

ELDRITCH

LINEAGE

STORY AND ART BY
SHAWNA NASH GARRITY



After Halloween, things returned to normal. Well... as normal as they ever got around Maplevue. And somehow, even though there was so much I wanted to do, time seemed to slip away from me. Election day came and went...



I PROMISE YOU, THAT WHILE SOME OF YOU MAY THINK ME TOO YOUNG FOR THIS POSITION, THAT I WILL BE THE BEST SENATOR THIS STATE HAS SEEN. I WILL BRING CHANGES LIKE NO ONE BEFORE TO THIS STATE, AND TO THIS GREAT COUNTRY OF OURS, WE WILL HELP IT BECOME EVEN GREATER. THANK YOU ALL FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE YOU.



I WOULD ESPECIALLY LIKE TO THANK ALL OF THE YOUNG VOTERS WHOM I MET ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL, FROM THOSE ATTENDING COLLEGE IN TRAVERSE CITY, DOWN TO THE STUDENTS IN MAPLEVUE. MY BATTLE, THE BATTLE TO LIFT UP THE LOWER AND MIDDLE CLASSES, AND TO ENSURE EQUALITY FOR ALL MINORITY GROUPS, REGARDLESS OF ORIENTATION OR BREEDING, CONTINUES--



BREEDING?
WHY, SENATOR GREY,
DON'T YOU MEAN RACE?



RACE IS SUCH A
CHARGED WORD. I FEEL
IT'S MANIPULATIVE
TO--

Geeze, enough of that...Truth is, I'd been so distracted by all of this monster crap that I'd forgotten all about it until the last minute. I guess time flies when you have to keep track of things like moon phases and whether or not you're eating enough red meat to sustain a wolf while on a college student's budget. Lycanthropy is hard to maintain.



Exams came and went and well even though I tried really, really hard.. I could have done better.

I'M WORRIED THAT IF MY GRADES FALL, I'LL LOSE MY FULL-RIDE SCHOLARSHIP.. THIS WHOLE MESS IS MAKING LIFE SO HARD.

DO NOT WORRY, FAITH. I AM SURE YOU'LL KEEP YOUR SCHOLARSHIP. A GIRL OF YOUR BACKGROUND AND SKILL SET IS VERY MUCH WORTH THE INVESTMENT MADE BY THOSE GIVING THE SCHOLARSHIPS. I AM SURE THEY MUST HAVE SEEN THAT IN YOU TO HAVE GIVEN YOU THE SCHOLARSHIP IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I WISH I COULD BE AS SURE AS YOU, GAOTH.

SAY... I WAS WONDERING SOMETHING... IS THAT YOUR FIRST OR LAST NAME?

YOU ASK AS THOUGH IT WERE MY REAL NAME. GAOTH IS A NAME CHOSEN FOR ME, AND THOUGH IT IS FROM A LAND I DO NOT SPRING FROM, IT IS MEANT TO REFLECT THE MOUNTAIN WIND FOR WHICH I HAD OCCASIONALLY USED TO CARRY MESSAGES.

WELL, WHAT IS YOUR REAL NAME THEN? WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? YOU SEEM TO KNOW ME, BUT I HARDLY KNOW YOU.

I AM JUST A GENEROUS MOUNTAIN SPIRIT, FAITH, AND THAT IS ALL I WILL TELL YOU. HAVE YOU NOT PAID ATTENTION TO YOUR CHILDHOOD STORIES? RARELY DOES ONE OF THE FAIR FOLK GIVE UP HIS TRUE NAME...

SO NONE OF US KNOW IT?

SEAMUS MET ME LONG AGO, WHEN I WAS LESS PROTECTIVE OF MY NAME, BUT HE HAS ASSURED ME THAT HE WILL NOT SHARE, SO DO NOT ASK. TODD ALSO KEEPS MY SECRET NAME, SAME AS I KEEP HIS. HOWEVER, SHOULD YOU BY CHANCE EVER LEARN MINE, I FORBID YOU TO USE IT.

Weird as Gaoth was, he encouraged me to continue studying my "Werewolf lessons" when Todd was off doing stuff for him... which included, apparently, looking for the guy who bit me. That kind of thing is a no-no, I'm glad to say. While Dylan constantly reminded me not to let the werewolf stuff to get in the way of my mundane studies, Maggie somehow always had some means of interrupting me...

Maggie, a woman with curly grey hair and purple lipstick, is looking at a bookshelf. A speech bubble from her says: OH! HEY, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD LORD OF THE RINGS? I HAVEN'T READ THESE BOOKS IN AGES! OH FAITH, CAN I BORROW THEM? PLEASE?

OH! HEY, I DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD LORD OF THE RINGS? I HAVEN'T READ THESE BOOKS IN AGES! OH FAITH, CAN I BORROW THEM? PLEASE?

Dylan, a woman with long brown hair and a red sweater with a white fur collar, is talking to Maggie. A speech bubble from her says: SURE... HECK, I HAVEN'T EVEN READ THEM MYSELF YET, I SUPPOSE SOMEONE OUGHT TO.

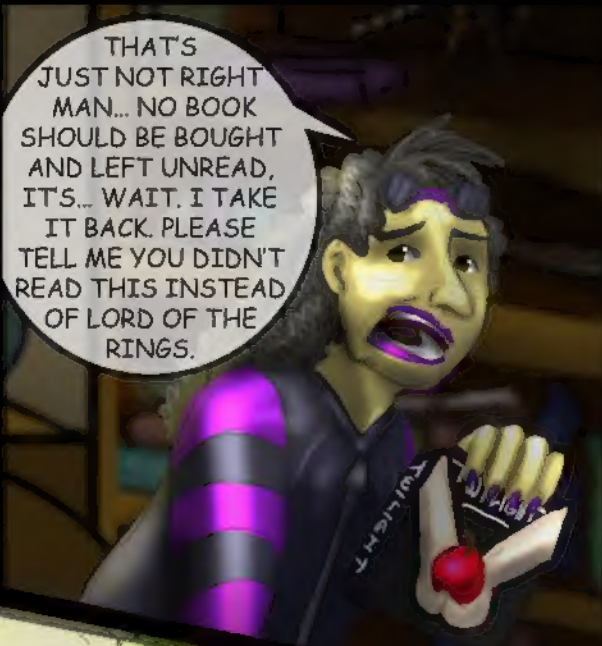
SURE...
HECK, I HAVEN'T
EVEN READ THEM
MYSELF YET, I
SUPPOSE SOMEONE
OUGHT TO.

YOU
HAVEN'T EVEN
READ THEM?
HOW LONG HAVE
YOU HAD
THEM?

I DUNNO. A
COUPLE OF YEARS
NOW, I GUESS.

JAYZEUS!
HOW CAN YOU
BUY A BOOK AND
NOT READ IT?

WELL,
I'VE SEEN THE
MOVIES...

Maggie is looking disappointed and holding a red cherry. A speech bubble from her says: THAT'S JUST NOT RIGHT MAN... NO BOOK SHOULD BE BOUGHT AND LEFT UNREAD, IT'S... WAIT. I TAKE IT BACK. PLEASE TELL ME YOU DIDN'T READ THIS INSTEAD OF LORD OF THE RINGS.

THAT'S
JUST NOT RIGHT
MAN... NO BOOK
SHOULD BE BOUGHT
AND LEFT UNREAD,
IT'S... WAIT. I TAKE
IT BACK. PLEASE
TELL ME YOU DIDN'T
READ THIS INSTEAD
OF LORD OF THE
RINGS.

LOOK, IT'S
THERAPY, OKAY? I
NEEDED SOME-
THING THAT
DEPICTED WERE-
WOLVES NICER
THAN THEY DID IN
EVERYTHING ELSE,
LIKE AN AMERICAN
WEREWOLF IN
LONDON...

Dylan and Maggie are talking. Dylan is smiling and has her hands clasped. A speech bubble from her says: HEY, THAT MOVIE IS AWESOME.

HEY, THAT MOVIE
IS AWESOME.

And of course, work continued on in spite of the weirdness in my life.

... SO, SINCE I COMPLETED MY FIRST QUARTER HERE, I'VE FILLED THE PREREQUISITES FOR THE GOODFELLOW SCHOLARSHIP, BUT IF MY GRADES FALL, I'M SURE I'LL LOSE IT. THAT SCHOLARSHIP IS THE WHOLE REASON I CAME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE. I'M STILL PAYING OFF MY TUITION FROM THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND WITHOUT SOME SORT OF FINANCIAL AID, I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO PAY FOR MY FOOD AND DORM AND--

MAN, FAITH, I'M SORRY TO HEAR YA THINK YA BOMBED YOUR TEST.

I WISH I COULD GIVE YA SOME OF MY GOOD LUCK, BUT, WELL, LUCK JUST COMES MORE NATURALLY TO ME THAN YOU.

YOU'RE SO HUMBLE ABOUT IT TOO.

IT MUST BE MY GOOD LOOKS. YOU REMEMBER THAT RESEARCH GIG I WAS TALKING ABOUT? I GOT HIRED FOR IT! NOT ONLY IS IT A GOOD NIGHT JOB, BUT IT PAYS A PRETTY PENNY AND THE GUY EVEN SAID THAT I CAN PLAY MMORPGS DURING THE SLOW TIMES. IT'LL HELP PAY MY DAD'S PSYCHOLOGIST BILLS... HE JUST... HASN'T BEEN THE SAME LATELY. THOUGH, TRUTH BE TOLD, I KIND OF THINK THIS GUY MIGHT BE A HACK... I HAD TO SIGN A SECRECY AGREEMENT, AND HE HAS SOME WEIRD IDEAS AND--

JAY? I'M KIND OF DOWN, SO, HOW ABOUT YOU NOT RUB MY NOSE IN HOW GOOD YOU'RE DOING? MAYBE WE CAN TALK ABOUT SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

UM... I JUST GOT THIS NEW GAME THAT'S REALLY AWESOME! IT'S FULL OF ALL OF THESE FANTASY MONSTERS, AND THERE'S A MILLION DIFFERENT WAYS TO PLAY IT. THEY'RE SO FUN TO KILL WITH THE BIG OL SWORD I HAVE, THOUGH THERE ARE NORMAL BAD GUYS TOO. I WAS DOING SO WELL UNTIL ONE OF THEM SHOT ME IN THE KNEE...

OH REALLY? THAT SOUNDS KIND OF LIKE ONE OF THE GAMES MY ROOM-MATE PLAYS...

The biggest distraction, however, was Christmas. I had decided that nothing, not even being a werewolf, was going to dampen my holiday, even though the full moon did fall on Christmas eve this year. That just meant I had to get everything wrapped early. In fact, By the first day of Christmas break, I'd mailed off both of my parent's gifts, and was almost all set for the Christmas party at the Layline.



I'd even been helping decorate for the occasion, though, Gaoth steered away from a lot of the specifically Christian motifs, and had some downright odd decorations.



For instance, he had a green Santa Claus, but he was all thin, and crowned with Holly, and he had several representations of a scary figure that looked goat-like.

He called it the statue Krampus. I called it creepy. It was a little too realistic for my tastes.



However, perhaps his oddest choice in decoration is that the Christmas tree was hung upside-down, and the decorations were largely fruits, nuts, candies and colored bags filled with treats. He said he liked the older traditions.



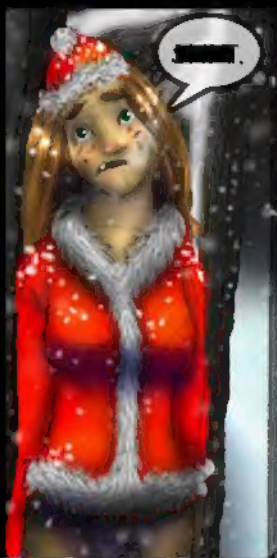
Weird... but God, I love Christmas.

I didn't have a whole lot of money to go around... but I had enough to get a few presents for my friends. I even had company as I left on my shopping trip, since my little black cat friend decided to tag along. He'd been doing that a lot since Halloween. Maybe it thought I'd run into more ghouls...



It was then I noticed a peculiar smell. It was wolfy, like me, but not like the bastard who bit me. It was hard to catch, partially because the cold had made my nose plug up. Then... then I realized that it wasn't just one scent. There were several scents... similar, but different. My human nose had been getting more wolf-like in terms of sense of smell, but some things, like discerning different individuals of the same species were still hard for me.







Man, they're FAST!



AIEEE!



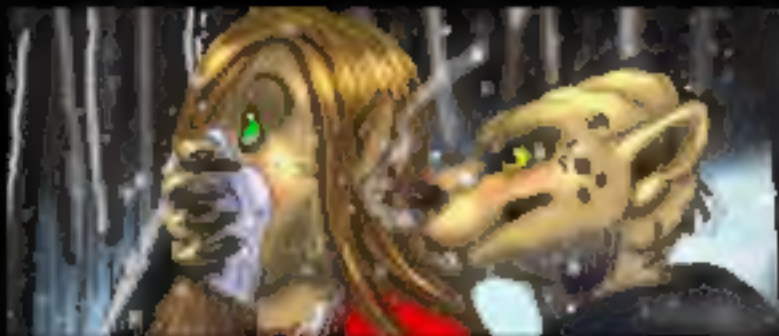
WHUMP!



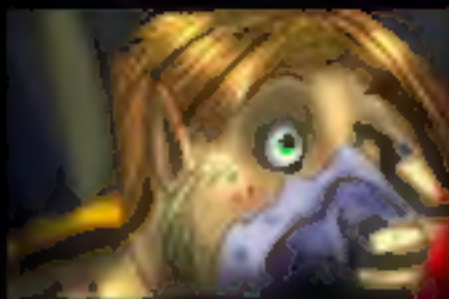
What the
snot is that?!



Did a werewolf lose
a fight with an elec-
tric razor or what?



The cloth they shoved into my face smelled... so sweet... it was wonderful, calming... and then... I smelled nothing. I was aware of... nothing. Sometimes I'd start to wake up... I felt myself being carried... and then lying down. At first, I couldn't manage to open my eyes. Eventually though... the effects began to wear off.



But every time I started to wake up and fuss, they shoved that sweet-smelling cloth into my face again...

Yet, somehow my addled brain realized that if I laid still... maybe they wouldn't use the cloth to make me pass out again.



My head began to clear



I dared to take a brief peek around myself. I saw... I saw the inside of a van, I think. I felt like I was on some sort of vehicle, and I could smell exhaust.



After what felt like at least half an hour, someone spoke, and I felt the creature nearest me grab my wrist, and everything suddenly felt so... weird... I couldn't help it anymore. Even though my brain still felt weird and fuzzy, I took the risk and opened my eyes.



My God... It was like the van was full of stars!

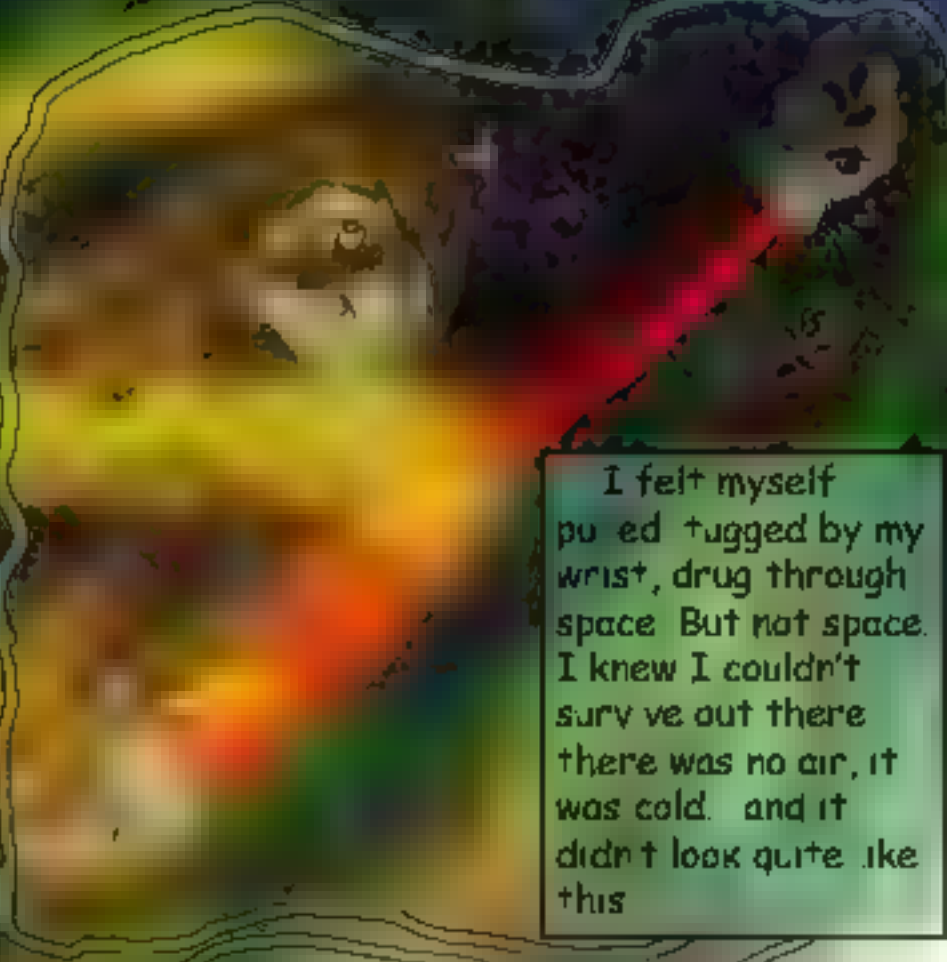


I couldn't make sense of it at first. Colors swirled and grew brighter and brighter until...

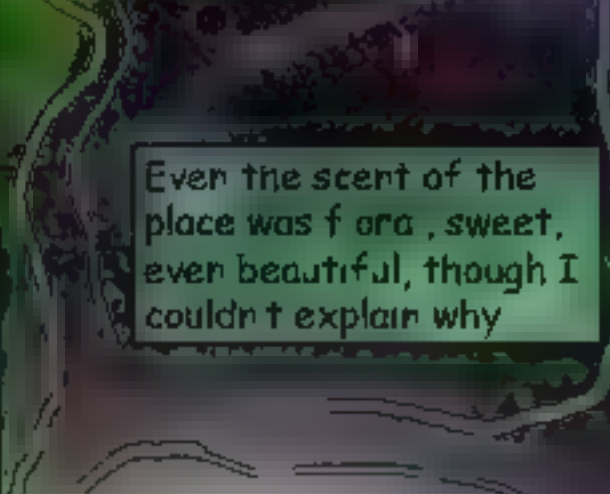
Until it was all ...

[LIGHT!]

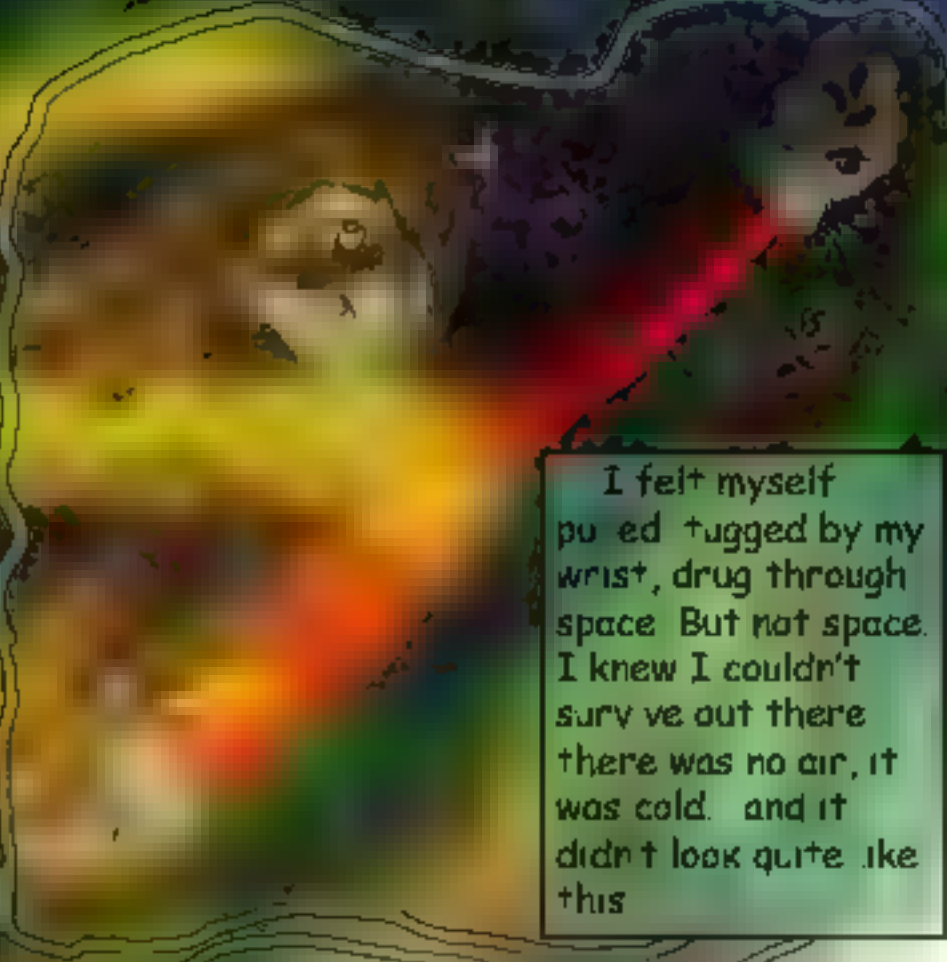
As the blinding light faded, I felt as if the floor beneath me vanished replaced by a strange, floating sensation. Everything felt, incredibly comfortable, perfect to the point of it being strange, a most unsettling. Able to see again, I found that Instead of the strange creatures and the van, I saw



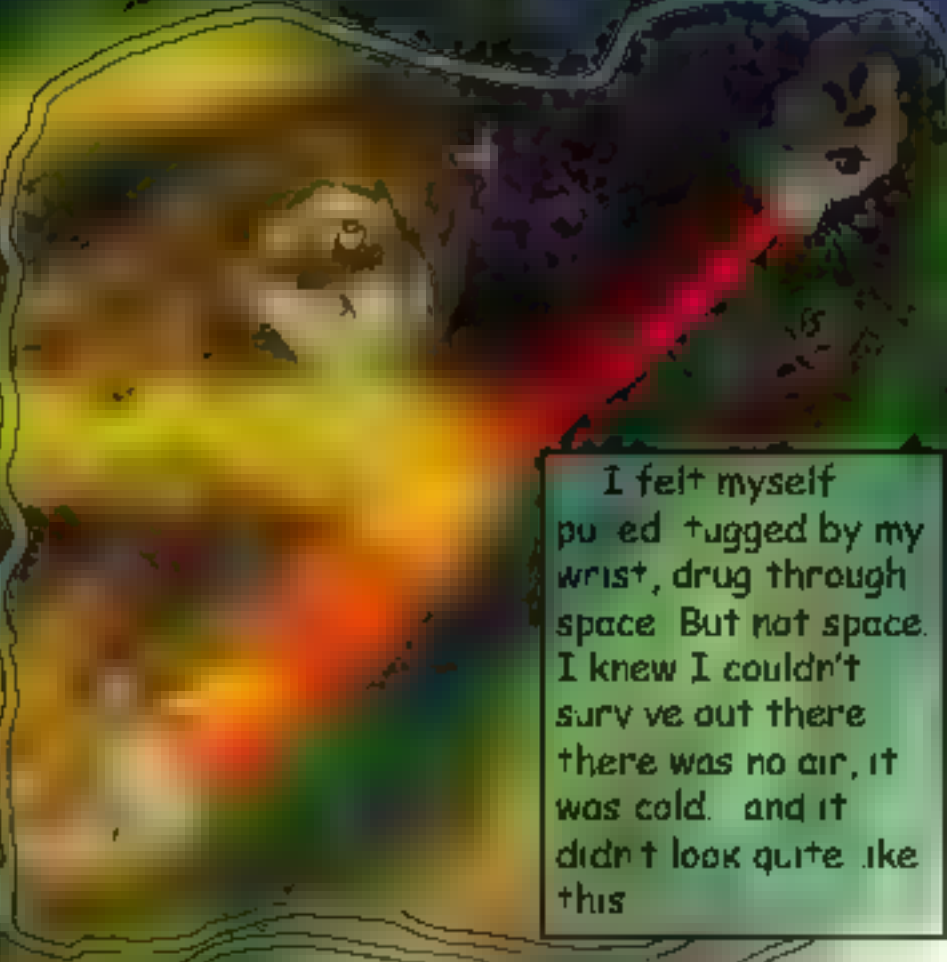
Some of the stars
moved, flying along
like colorful comets



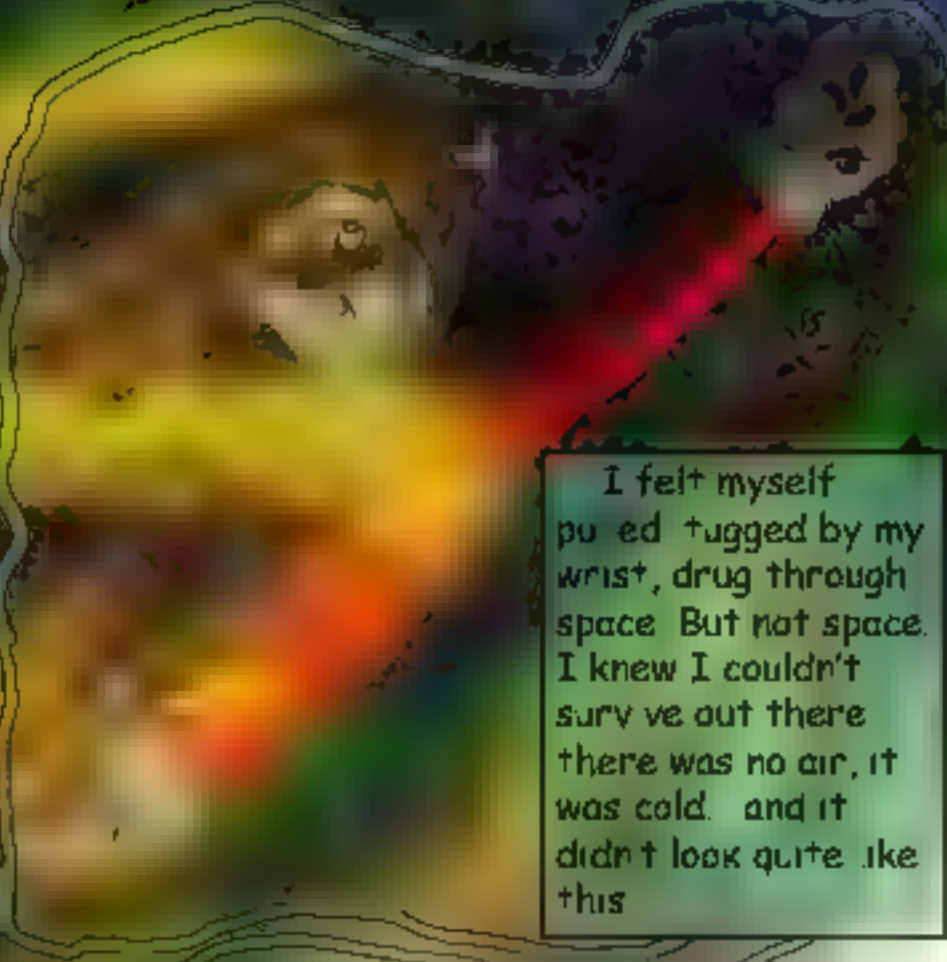
Even the scent of the
place was foreign, sweet,
even beautiful, though I
couldn't explain why



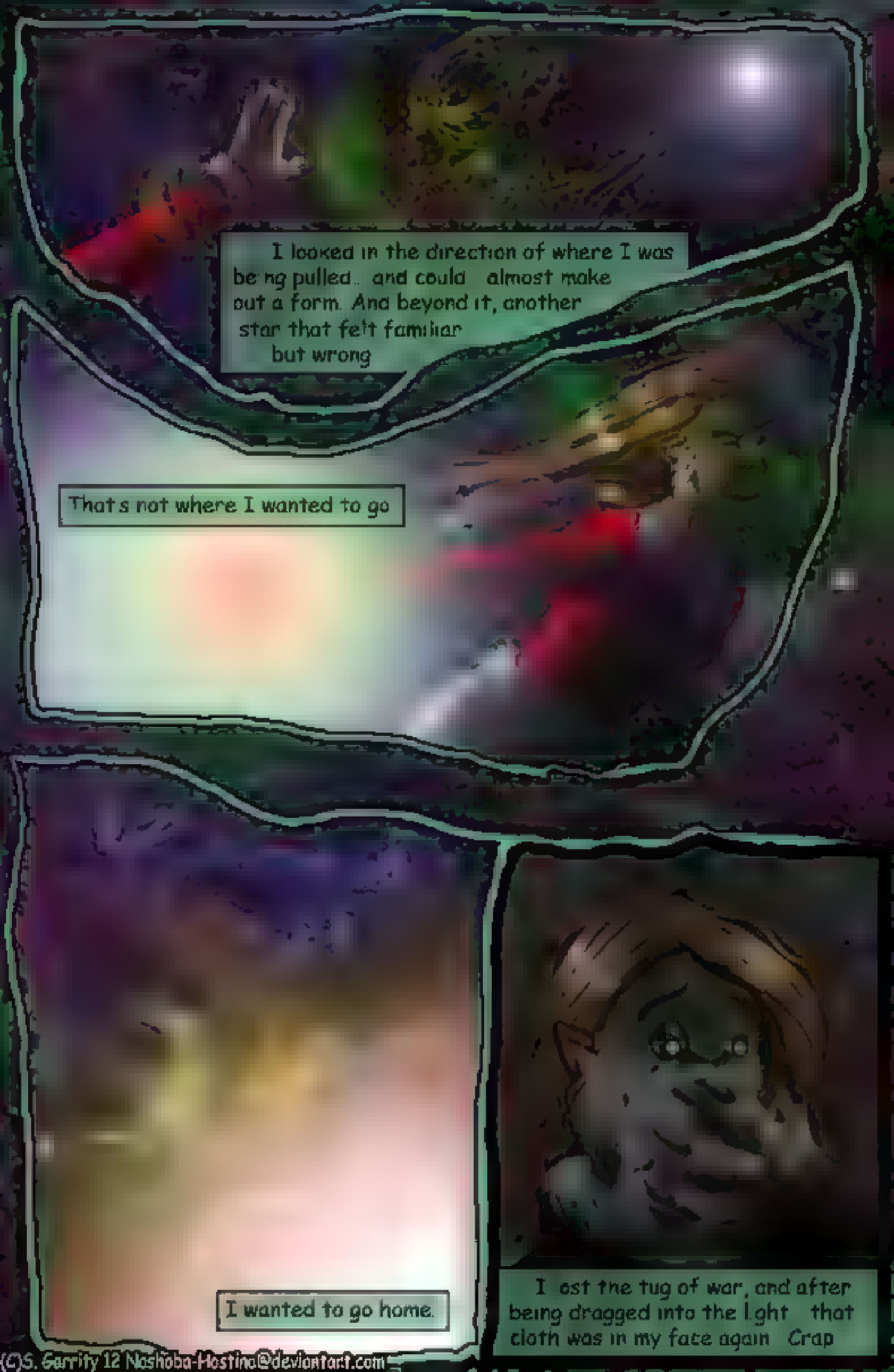
I felt myself
pulled, tugged by my
wrist, drug through
space. But not space.
I knew I couldn't
survive out there
there was no air, it
was cold, and it
didn't look quite like
this



Sometimes, I'd draw
closer to a star and I
could see through it. Into
other places, like a
window, or a hole. It was
amazing and beautiful and
words cannot describe what
it was like. Not in a million
years could I paint some-
thing that would capture it,
nor could anyone else.



In spite of my drowsy confusion, I found myself wondering: was I dead? I
didn't feel dead. I had to get home, and as soon as I thought of home, I felt
compelled to look at a star, or window or whatever it was. I wanted to get to
it somehow, and at that moment, I felt myself surge forward, like I could fly.
It was practically instinctual. But something was holding me back.

A hand with a red sleeve reaches out from a dark, swirling, ethereal space. The background is a mix of dark purples, blues, and greens, with a bright light source in the upper right corner.

I looked in the direction of where I was
being pulled.. and could almost make
out a form. And beyond it, another
star that felt familiar
but wrong

That's not where I wanted to go

I wanted to go home.

A close-up of a person's face, looking upwards with a distressed or pleading expression. The face is pale with dark, smudged features, and the background is dark and blurry.

I lost the tug of war, and after
being dragged into the light that
cloth was in my face again. Crap



UGH, MY ACHING
EVERYTHING

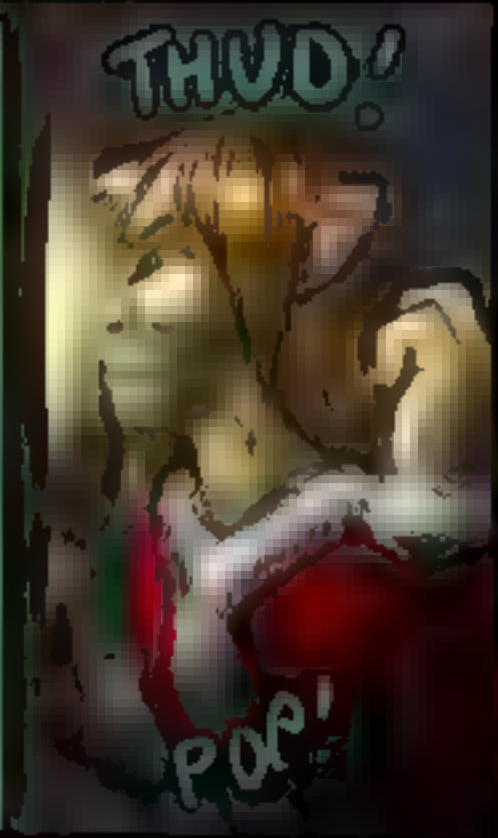


GASP!



HEY
CAN ANYONE
HEAR ME? LET
ME OUT!

The whole place
smelled so odd. Like
ozone... but also earth
and moisture, like rust,
and waxes and lico-
rice... no, like fennel. I
could hear voices... but
I couldn't make out
what was being said.
Not even what language
it was, though it
sounded similar to the
language the cat had
spoken. I yelled and
yelled... but they just
didn't seem to care,
whoever they were.



THUD!

POP!



CRACK

THUD!

RRRIIP!



GRRR RRR RRR GRAWA

GRUND!



I was scared, but that fear had quickly turned to anger... to rage. Rage spawned by my lack of ability to do anything .. I couldn't run, I couldn't fight my way out, I was trapped. And yet Something else was very wrong Or right? It was like my rage fueled my change. And it felt GOOD. I felt... I felt huge. Taller, broader And weighty .. That kind of weight like like I had just stepped out of a pool... However, mostly, I felt... unrefined, yet energetic, like a fauvist painting



CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK

FOOTSTEPS?

GRRR?



IF YOU ARE, AH, QUITE DONE, PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK IN A, AH, REASONABLE MANNER



RAWRRG!
LET ME OUT

CAREFUL...
THE BARS ARE
SILVER, AND THE
WOOD IS THAT OF
THE ASH TREE. IF
THESE DO NOT
SEEM TO DETUR
YOU, WE WILL BE
FORCED TO USE
MISTLETOE JUICE
AS WELL....

It took a moment
to find my voice.



WHAT'S ASH
TREE WOOD THAT
GOT TO DO WITH IT? I BET
I COULD STILL BREAK
YOUR STUPID DOOR
DOWN.

STRENGTH
ISN'T EVERY-
THING

MOST WEREWOLVES
ARE RATHER ALLERGIC TO ASH
YOU WOULDN'T WANT A REACTION,
WOULD YOU? AND MISTLETOE
WILL CHANGE YOU BACK--

JUST GREAT WELL, LOOK
BUDDY, THIS IS WRONGFUL IMPRISONMENT I'VE
NOT DONE ANYTHING WRONG, AND WHEN MY
FRIENDS NOTICE I'M MISSING, THEY'LL GET THE
POLICE TO TRACK YOU CRAZIES DOWN!

How could something this
crazy uphold in court? I didn't
know, but I continued anyway



YOU'RE GONNA BE IN
JAIL FOR A LONG TIME FOR
KIDNAPPING ME AND GIVING ME
LSD OR WHATEVER IT WAS THAT
MADE ME SEE.. WHATEVER IT
WAS THAT I SAW

AND JUST WHAT
DID YOU SEE?

UM... OUTER SPACE . SORT
OF LIKE THOSE SHOTS
FROM NASA OF SPACE
CLOUDS AND STUFF BUT THE
STARS WERE LIKE WINDOWS
TO OTHER PLACES AND I
SAW SYMBOLS, I THINK.
WHAT DOES IT MATTER
ANYWAY, YOU'RE STILL
GONNA GO TO JAIL!



INTERESTING



WELL, IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, WHAT YOU SAW WASN'T CAUSED BY THE WOLFSBANE WE EXPOSED YOU TO. ACONITE IS VERY TOXIC, EVEN TO WEREWOLVES.. BUT, SINCE MOST OF OUR SPECIES HEAL AT A... HOW WOULD YOU SAY... ACCELERATED RATE, WE ARE ABLE TO RECOVER, BUT IT, AH.. PUTS US OUT FOR A WHILE. WHAT YOU SAW WAS REAL, AND A GOOD SIGN FOR YOU. MOST PEOPLE CANNOT MAKE SENSE OF THE SPACE BETWEEN REALMS. YOU INTERPRET IT AS A FIELD OF STARS, WHICH IS NOT UNCOMMON. YOU KNOW I HEAR THAT YOU ACTUALLY ATTEMPTED TO GO BACK IN THE DIRECTION YOU CAME, BACK TOWARD YOUR HOME?

SINCE I WASN'T LISTENING, IF I SAY YES, CAN I LEAVE?

YOU SHOULD NOT WANT TO. AFTER ALL, YOU'VE COME SUCH A LONG WAY. YOU WERE BROUGHT THROUGH A GATEWAY YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THEM CALLED AH, LEY LINES. LEY LINES ARE LIKE REVERBERATING VIOLIN STRINGS THAT HOLD THIS UNIVERSE AND EVERYTHING BEYOND IT TOGETHER. THESE STRINGS WHICH ARE OUR, AH, GATEWAYS, ARE LOCATED WHERE REALMS, ALTERNATE WORLDS, MEET, PASS THROUGH ONE ANOTHER. GRIND AGAINST EACH OTHER UNTIL THE MEMBRANE BETWEEN THEM IS THIN ENOUGH FOR ONE TO LEAK. GENTLY, INTO THE OTHER. AT THESE PLACES, WE, THE HOUNDS OF GOD,

Why did that term sound familiar?

--CAN PASS THROUGH INTO THE SPACE BETWEEN WORLDS TO TRAVEL.. WHAT YOU SAW AS STARS WERE, AH, YOU MAY SAY, HOLES INTO DIFFERENT WORLDS, AND INTO DIFFERENT PLACES OF OUR OWN. SOME CONTEMPORARY MINDS HAVE POSTULATED ABOUT THEM. SUCH AS NATHAN ROSEN, AND OF COURSE I'M SURE YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH DR AL--

HOLD UP. SA SECI SEAMUS CALLED LEY LINES INTERDIMENSIONAL... SOMETHING OR ANOTHER YOU MEAN, BY DIFFERENT WORLDS... YOU MEAN DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS, DIFFERENT REALITIES?

YES. THEY ARE THE PLACES WHERE MANY OF THE, AH... ELDRITCH FOLK, AS THE FAE CALL THEM, ORIGINATED, AND WHERE MANY OF THOSE WHO DID NOT ADAPT AS MANKIND GREW STRONGER, FLED TO.



SO...
WAIT, WHERE AM
I THEN?!

RELAX. YOU'RE
IN ROME.

ROME ITALY?!

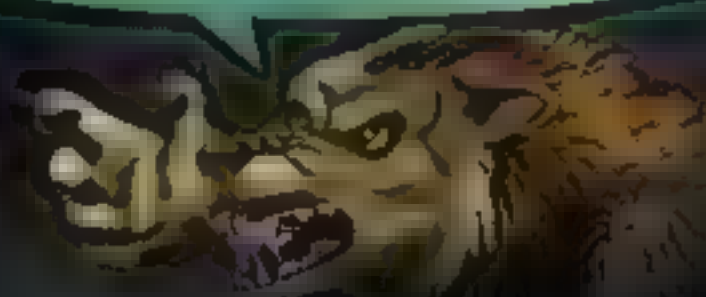
YES... WE
BROUGHT YOU HERE
BECAUSE WE THINK YOU
MAY BE ABLE TO FIGHT
FOR THE WELLNESS OF
THIS WORLD

AS ONE US.

WHY THE HELL DID
YOU BRING ME TO ROME FOR? I
DON'T WANT TO BE ONE OF YOU! I
WANT TO GO HOME!

YOU ARE HOME YOU KNOW YOU MUST HAVE BEEN, AH, DESTINED TO BE ONE OF US, GIVEN YOUR... MISFORTUNE OF BEING BITTEN BY A LESSER BREED OF WEREWOLF, AND YET STILL ABLE TO FUNCTION WHEN BETWEEN WORLDS. PERHAPS, IT IS BY GRACE OF SAINT NATALIS' WOLF BLESSING UPON YOUR MOTHER'S... FAMILY LINE THAT THE, AH, WEREWOLF TRAITS FROM YOUR FATHER'S SIDE SHINE THR--

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? MY MOM'S AN AIR FORCE OFFICER AND MY DAD'S A NOVELIST. THEY AREN'T WEREWOLVES, TRUST ME.



YOUR NAME TELLS MORE OF YOU THAN YOU KNOW. YOUR LAST NAME IS HEALEY-ESPOSITO. IS IT NOT? A COMBINATION OF YOUR PARENT'S SURNAMES AFTER THEY, AH, SPLIT?

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?



WE TRACKED YOUR MOTHER'S LINE TO IRELAND. BY THE BLESSING OF SAINT NATALIS, MANY OF HER ANCESTORS COULD TAKE ON WOLF FORMS. THIS BLESSING PASSES ON DOWN THROUGH FAMILIES... AH, GENERATIONS... AND YOUR FATHER... HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE ENDED UP IN YOUR COUNTRY YEARS AGO, ONE OF YOUR ANCESTORS, A BENANDANTI HOUND OF GOD, FELL IN LOVE WITH A WOMAN AND WED. AS IS OUR LAW HIS OFFSPRING WAS TO BE INDUCTED INTO OUR ORDER. BUT HE HAD THE RESULTING SON TAKEN AWAY AND, AH, GIVEN UP TO HUMANS. ORPHANAGES OF THE TIME GAVE SUCH ABANDONED CHILDREN THE SURNAME ESPOSITO. THIS MADE YOUR FAMILY HARD TO TRACK. ONLY AFTER YOUR GRANDFATHER PASSED NO, MOVED TO AMERICA. DOES YOUR LINE APPEAR IN OUR RECORDS IN THE VATICAN AGAIN. WITH SUCH STRONG, CHRISTIAN WEREWOLF BLOOD IN BOTH OF YOUR PARENTS' WELL...

AS I'M SURE THOSE AH, IMPURE CREATURES YOU SPEND YOUR TIME WITH TOLD YOU IF SOMEONE OF TWO AH, WOLF LINEAGES IS DRAWN TO AND EXPOSED TO THE PROPER, AH, LEY LINES, THEY WILL BECOME A WEREWOLF. WELL, UNLESS THEY'RE OF THOSE FILTHY, DEVIANT, INFECTIOUS SORT. OF COURSE LEY LINES THAT HELP WEREWOLVES ARE ALMOST ALWAYS IN FORESTS INCLUDING THOSE THAT HELP WE THE HOUNDS OF GOD...

YOU MEAN I WAS PRACTICALLY CURSED TO BE A WEREWOLF THIS WHOLE TIME? WHAT THE HELL?



Suddenly it all made sense. Why I always wanted to be outdoors as a kid, why I was so stupid and wandered into the forest at night. I was drawn to it like Seamus said "Called" Eldritch Folk were. The bigger werewolf just bit me first. So what did that make me?



LANGUAGE MISS ESPOSITO. SURELY, IT COULD NOT BE COINCIDENCE THAT YOU TOOK SO WELL TO USING AN IRON ROD, ONE OF OUR PRIMARY WEAPONS, TO FIGHT OFF THE GHOULS? AND PERHAPS, YOU LIKE LICORICE BECAUSE IT TASTES LIKE FENNEL, ANOTHER WEAPON OF OURS?

I DON'T CARE IF IT'S A COINCIDENCE! I'LL HAVE NO PART OF SOME GROUP OF WEREWOLVES THAT KIDNAPS PEOPLE. HOUNDS OF GOD MY ASS, YOU'RE A CRIMINAL, AND PROBABLY CRAZY TO BOOT. THE WORLD WOULD BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT SCUMBAGS LIKE YOU!

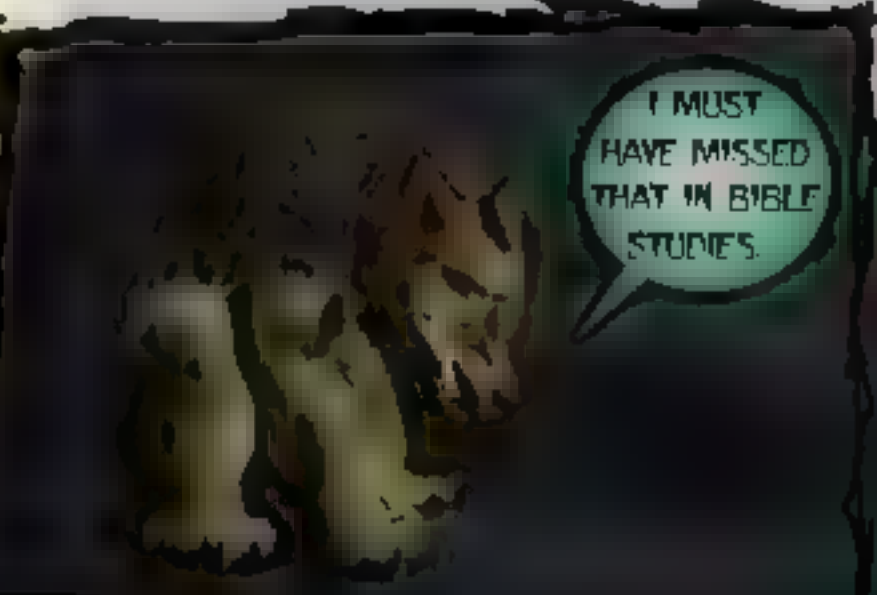


SCUMBAGS LIKE ME? HUH, I AM FAR FROM A SCUMBAG YOU SEE, THE OTHER MAGICAL RACES... THE FAE AND VAMPIRES AND OTHERS... ONES LIKE SOME OF YOUR FRIENDS... THEY'RE OUT FOR THEMSELVES. IT IS WE, THE CANINE RACES THAT HAVE ALWAYS GIVEN OF OURSELVES WHO HAVE ALWAYS LOOKED FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL.

OH, SO THAT'S WHY WEREWOLVES ARE ALWAYS THE GOOD GUYS IN MOVIES, RIGHT?

IF ONLY YOU WOULD BE SILENT! FOR YOU, THAT WOULD BE WISDOM. THERE HAVE BEEN THOSE WHO HAVE ABUSED THE POWER OF THE WOLF AND THOSE, SADLY, ARE THE ONES BEST KNOWN AND REMEMBERED BY HUMAN HISTORY. BUT WE AND OUR CANINE KIN HAVE BEEN AROUND THROUGH THE AGES, ALWAYS HELPING THINGS ALONG ON THE SIDE. AFTER ALL, IF IT WERE NOT FOR THE WEREWOLF WHO SUCKLED TWO INFANT BOYS, OUR GREAT CITY OF ROME, THE VERY CITY WE ARE BENEATH, WOULD NEVER HAVE BECOME WHAT IT IS TODAY!

EVEN IN YOUR COUNTRY, THERE HAVE BEEN GREAT WEREWOLVES IN YOUR HISTORY. YOUR, PRESIDENT LINCOLN, WAS A WEREWOLF. THE BULLETS KEPT IN YOUR MUSEUMS ARE FAKE. SILVER HAD BEEN USED TO KILL HIM. ANOTHER OF YOUR PRESIDENTS, THEODORE ROOSEVELT, WAS A WEREWOLF. WHEN HE WAS SHOT, IT WAS WITH A NORMAL BULLET, AND THUS, HE WAS ABLE TO STAND AND GIVE A SPEECH BEFORE SEEKING MEDICAL ATTENTION. HIS PRONOUNCED INTEREST IN THE HIDDEN GREAT APES, THE... BIG FEET, WAS A COVER FOR HIS SEARCH FOR MORE WEREWOLVES LIKE HIMSELF. THE TRAPPER HE FOUND TORN APART WAS DONE BY ONE OF OUR... LESS SAVORY COUSINS, WHICH HE FOUND AND BROUGHT TO JUSTICE. AND OF COURSE, WE WOLVES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A LARGE PART OF THE CHURCH...



I MUST HAVE MISSED THAT IN BIBLE STUDIES.

TYPICAL. IGNORANT! WHY, SAINT RONAN WAS A WEREWOLF... HE HAD TO KEEP IT SECRET, AND WAS ALMOST CAUGHT... BUT OUR KIND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THERE. WHY ELSE WOULD SO MANY SAINTS BE THE PATRON SAINTS OF WOLVES? SAINT PETER, SAINT GEORGE, EVEN SAINT NICHOLAS! THEY, AND MANY MORE UNDERSTOOD OUR KIND. PERHAPS YOU REMEMBER SAINT CHRISTOPHER, THE PARTON SAINT OF TRAVELERS? HE TOO, WAS ONE OF OUR KIND. WHILE OFTEN MISREMEMBERED AS ONE OF THE CYNOCEPHALI, HE COULD SHAPESHIFT! HE CHANGED FROM A CANINE-HEADED CREATURE TO THE FORM OF A HUMAN... AND WAS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE MODERN BENANDANTI LINE!



OF COURSE, HIS, AND OUR, LENIAGE COMES FROM LONG BEFORE THAT PERHAPS YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE GREAT SPHINX OF GIZA? THE REASON ITS HEAD IS SO SMALL IS BECAUSE IT WAS ORIGINALLY A STATUE OF THE JACKAL-HEADED CREATURE, ANUBIS! IN THE CITY OF LYCOPOLIS, ANUBIS' WOLF-HEADED SON WEPAWET, LIKE US -

WEPA-WET? I DON'T KNOW ABOUT MR. WEP, BUT YOU'RE ALL WET, THAT'S FOR SURE.



--WAS THE OPENER OF WAYS. HE WAS THE FIRST OF OUR KIND WHO WAS ABLE TO CROSS BETWEEN WORLDS. A TRAIT WHICH ENABLES US TO OPEN THE GATES TO HELL AND PREVENT THE DEVILS THERE FROM SRTEALING AWAY THE CROPS, ENSURING THEIR SAFETY EACH YEAR.

I ALREADY TOLD YOU... YOU ARE HOME YOU'RE WHERE A... FINE CREATURE LIKE YOU BELONGS.



... WHAT, ARE YOU HITTING ON ME, NOW?



LOOK. YOU'RE A SPECIAL SNOWFLAKE. I GET IT. BUT I CHOOSE TO KEEP WHAT LITTLE SANITY I HAVE LEFT. WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO GET YOU TO TAKE ME BACK HOME? MAYBE I CAN HELP A LITTLE AND THEN HEAD ON BACK?



FLATTERY WILL GET YOU NOWHERE.

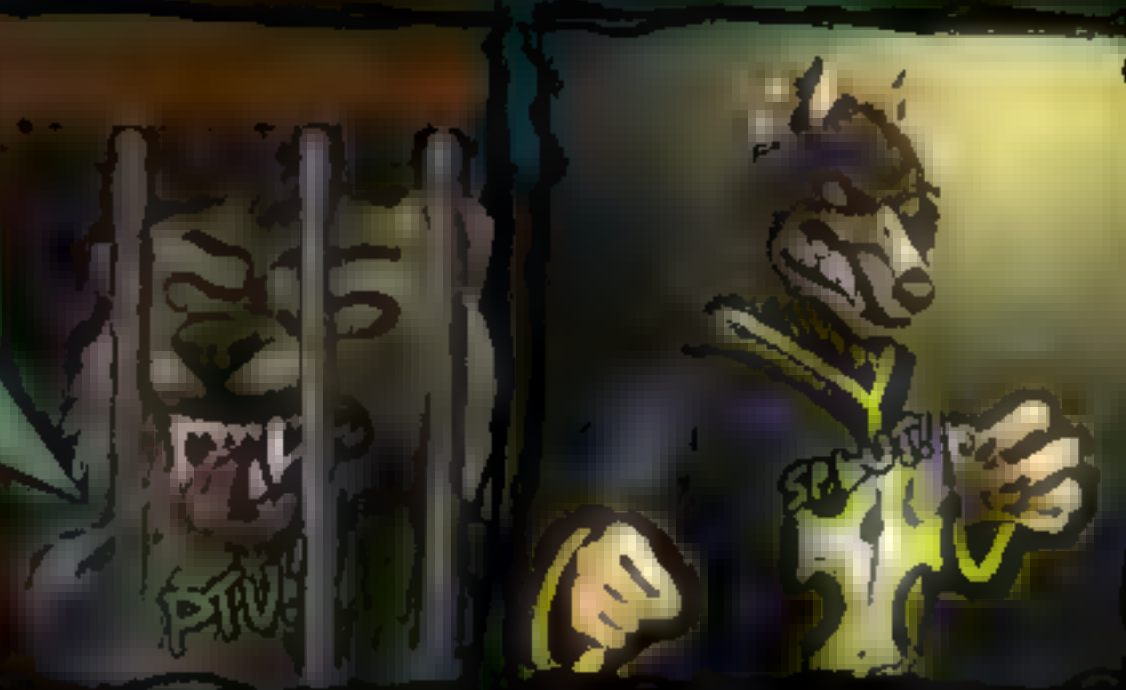


...PLEASE. LET ME GO.

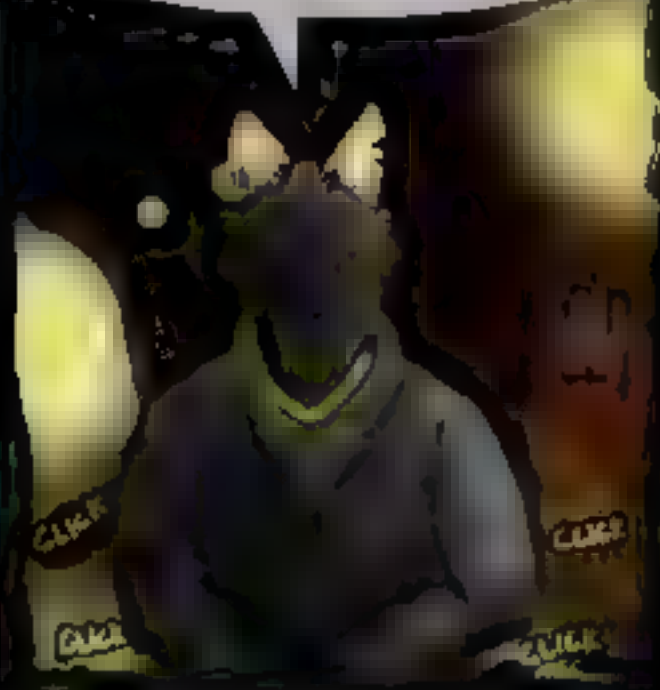
WE CANNOT LET A HOUND OF GOD, A BENANDANTI WEREWOLF TO ROAM FREE. SUCH LONELY INDIVIDUALS TEND TO GO... AH, SHALL WE SAY... ROGUE? YES. ROGUE. AND WHILE WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY, AH, ROGUE WEREWOLVES AS AWFUL AS SAY, JACK THE RIPPER, WE CANNOT HAVE ANOTHER INCIDENT LIKE WE'VE HAD WITH THE RAKE--



I AM NOT A BENA-BENADAN-- WHATEVER, I'M NOT ONE OF YOU SUPPOSED HOUNDS OF GOD!! NO GOD OF MINE WOULD APPROVE OF WHAT YOU'RE DOING!



II I... WILL SPEAK WITH YOU LATER, AND YOU WILL BE IN BETTER SPIRITS THEN. YOU WILL SEE THE LIGHT.



Oh yeah, like all of this was gonna convince me. But.. something about him... the way he stood the position of his ears, his tone... at first it made me want to flap down and whine... but then it just made me angry.



I sort of... went on autopilot... did whatever made sense to my head, looking for anything that would help.



SNIFF?



There was no scent of fresh air or of nature... and the door itself smelled awful

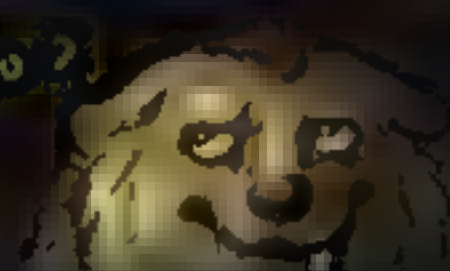


Howling made me feel better... like, if I howled loud enough, someone would come and make it all better

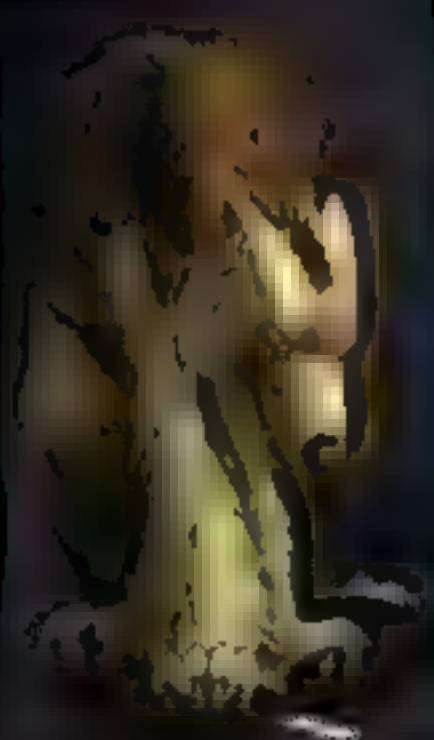


The howling reply sounded unfamiliar, scary. It was then that I started to feel so very... very alone. I was trapped, I didn't know what to do, and I probably hadn't endeared myself to the only guy who I needed to get me out

ROOOOOOOO?



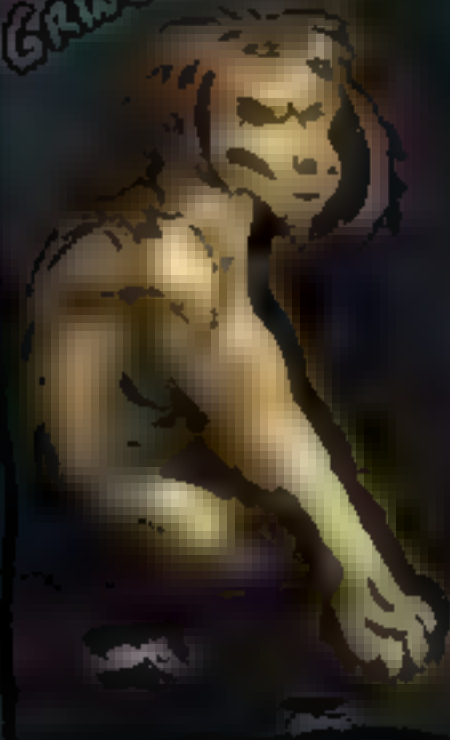
KRUNCH



CRACK!

GRIND

POP!



God, please, please help me.

Sob...



My human form felt comforting in this strange environment but even though I slept in the corner by the door so it was hard for them to see me, if I wanted to keep my dignity, I had to change in the morning.



Thankfully the wolf-shape was the one I was familiar with... I'd have to ask Seamus about the strange shape from the previous day... If I ever escaped.



The Hound of God, whom I'd decided to call Mr. Oppressive, didn't come back... But I could still smell him. Every now and again, I would hear someone coming down the halls...

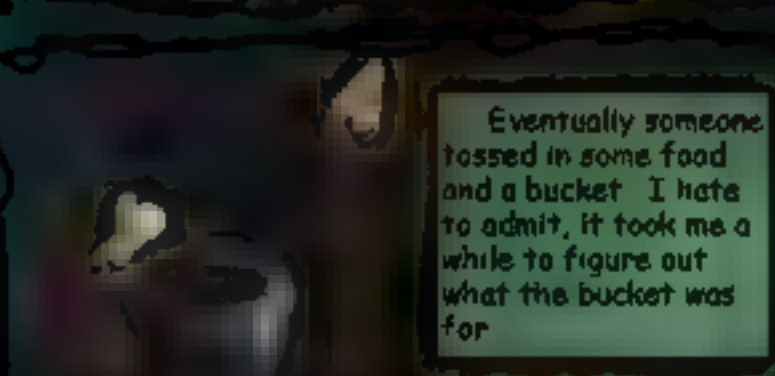


HEY, HEY YOU! HELP ME! ER... PLEASE? NO, PLEASE NO, WAIT, COME BACK! I NEED YOU!

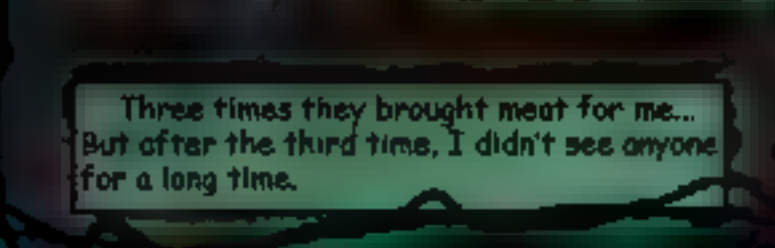
MI DISPIACE TANTO ...



Eventually someone tossed in some food and a bucket. I hate to admit, it took me a while to figure out what the bucket was for.



Three times they brought meat for me... But after the third time, I didn't see anyone for a long time.



MROW?



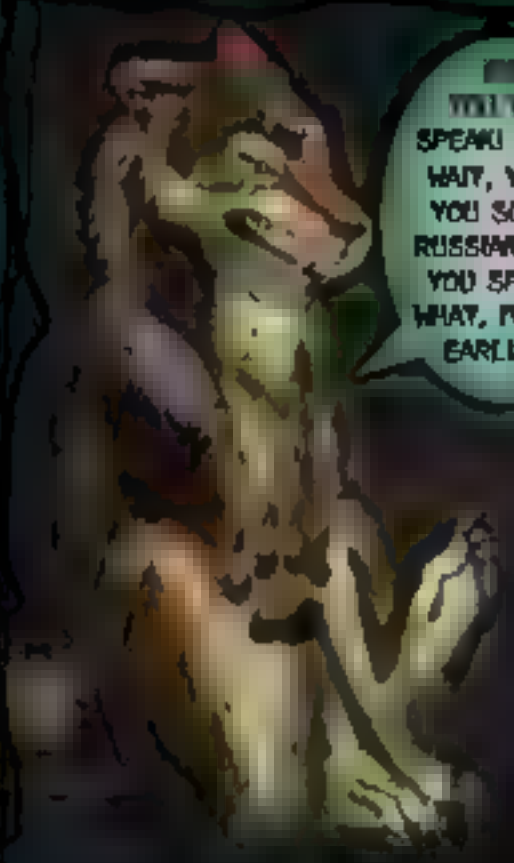
YOU!





YOU'RE THE ONE WHO GOT ME CAUGHT! HOW THE HELL DID YOU GET IN HERE, YOU YOU MANGY CAT?

VELL, IT VASNT ALL THAT HARD, REALLY AND MY NAME IS NOT MANGY IS ARTUR

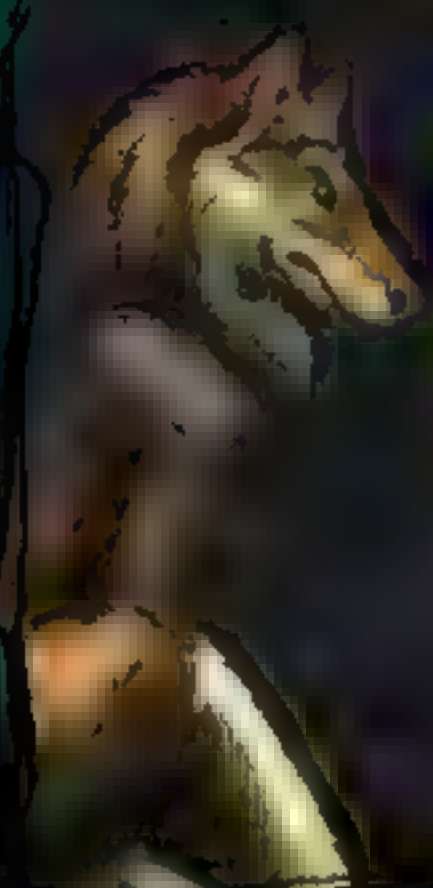


VELL VAI SPEAKI AND... WAIT, YOU... YOU SOUND RUSSIAN. BUT YOU SPOKE, WHAT, ITALIAN EARLIER?

VELL, I SPEAK ENGLISH, GERMAN, ITALIAN, AND RUSSIAN TO VARYING DEGREES MY ITALIAN ACCENT IS BETTER THAN MY AMERICAN ONE, THOUGH, MY COMPREHENSION OF YOUR ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS BETTER THAN MY UNDERSTANDING OF ITALIAN.



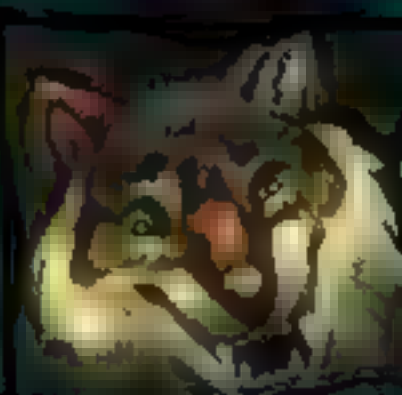
I OUGHT TO RING YOUR FURRY LITTLE NECK FOR THIS...



I AM SORRY... AFTER ALL YOU WERE SO VERY KIND TO ME. I WAS MERELY... FOLLOWING ORDERS.

ORDERS? YOU MEAN FROM ME ~~THE MANGY CAT~~?

YES. I AM... ON LOAN FROM THE ~~WILDMAN BEING~~ NATI PACK.



IN THE NATI PACK? NORMALLY I WOULDN'T CARE, BUT...



SEEMING
AS I HAVE
NOTHING
BETTER TO DO
STUCK
HERE...
COURTIOUSLY NO
WEREWOLF,
WHAT ARE
YOU TALKING
ABOUT?

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF
BENANDANTI... ER... YOU MIGHT CALL
THEM EH, GOOD WALKERS. AT THE TOP ARE THE
BENANDANTI VEREVOLVES. THEY CAN PHYSICALLY
TRAVEL THROUGH LEY LINE GATEWAYS, AND DO THE
VORST OF THE FIGHTING AGAINST THE MELANDANTI,
DEVILS, AND OTHER EVILS. THEN, THERE ARE THOSE
LIKE ME AGRARIAN BENANDANTI. WE ARE SIMILAR TO
YOUR FRIEND, DYLAN... THIS FORM YOU SEE IS MY
PETCH... A SPIRITUAL PROJECTION IN THE FORM OF AN
ANIMAL, THOUGH, OURS IS CORPOREAL. WE USE THESE
ANIMAL FORMS TO FIGHT ANY MELANDANTI WHO MAKE
IT TO THIS SIDE OF THE LAYLINES AND TRY TO STEAL
THE LIFE OF THE CROPS. AND THEN THERE ARE THE
FUNERARY BENANDANTI. THEY ARE VERY RARE...
ABLE TO SPEAK WITH SPIRITS AND ASK
THEM TO HELP US KEEP A LOOK OUT
FOR MELANDANTI.

SO... THE BENANDANTI... THEY ARE
MORE OF AN ORGANIZATION OF THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF
ELDRITCH FOLK, THAN ONE SPECIES?

SO... WHY BELIEVE IT?
WHY WORK WITH THEM IF THEY ORDER YOU TO DO
THINGS LIKE KIDNAP PEOPLE?

THE ANIMAL THAT WOULD
FACE COVERING THING I HAD? ...HOW DID YOU
KNOW THAT?

WELL IF THIS IS SOME CREEPY
KIDNAPPING ORDER OR SOMETHING... HOW COME
I'VE NEVER HEARD OF IT?

WELL... ZEE VEREVOLVES SAY THAT WE
AGRARIAN AND FUNERARY BENANDANTI ARE OF
WEAKER BLOODLINES THAT SPRANG FROM THE PURE-
BLOODED VEREVOLF BENANDANTI. BUT TO BE HONEST
THAT SEEMS A LITTLE UNLIKELY...

IT IS NOT MY CHOICE. WE ARE
BORN INTO IT... LIKE YOU, YOU WERE BORN WITH A
CAUL, WERE YOU NOT?

ALMOST ALL BENANDANTI ARE BORN WITH IT
EVEN ONE OF THE VEREVOLVES HEARS OF SOMEONE BEING BORN
WITH A CAUL, ESPECIALLY IF THEY ARE OF BENANDANTI LINEAGE
THEY WILL INDUCT THEM INTO THE ORDER.

THE VEREVOLVES HAVE LET SOME INFORMATION OUT. BUT VERY
LITTLE ABOUT THEMSELVES. CENTURIES AGO, THE BENANDANTI VER-
EVOLVES WORKED WITH MAGIC FOLK... VIZARDS, I SUPPOSE YOU WOULD
CALL THEM, AND DEVELOPED A WAY TO CREATE NEW VEREVOLVES,
ONES BORN WITHOUT CAUL... THEY MADE IT INFECTIOUS. SOON THE
BENANDANTI GOT TOO BOLD AND TOO EXPOSED TO THE GENERAL
PUBLIC, AND THE CHURCH EVENTUALLY TURNED AGAINST THEM. IN
TIME, EVEN THEISS, ONE OF THE VEREVOLVES WAS TAKEN IN AND
GIVEN LASHINGS. THE BENANDANTI ORDER DECIDED TO STOP CREAT-
ING NEW VEREVOLVES, AND NOW ONLY HAVE HEREDITARY VER-
EVOLVES... BUT THE BLOODLINES ARE WEAK, DUE TO AVOIDING
TAKING NEW BLOOD INTO THE ORDER IN ENSURE MOST BIRTHS
RESULT IN VEREVOLVES. THEY HAVE INBRED, LEADING TO NUMEROUS
FLAWS, SUCH AS FURLESSNESS AMONGST MANY OF THEM. THAT IS
WHY YOU ARE SO VALUABLE TO THEM... YOU ARE... UNIQUE. FLAWED
IN MANY WAYS BUT OF INTEREST, ESPECIALLY SINCE WE HAVE
REASON TO BELIEVE THAT SOON THE MELANDANTI WILL...



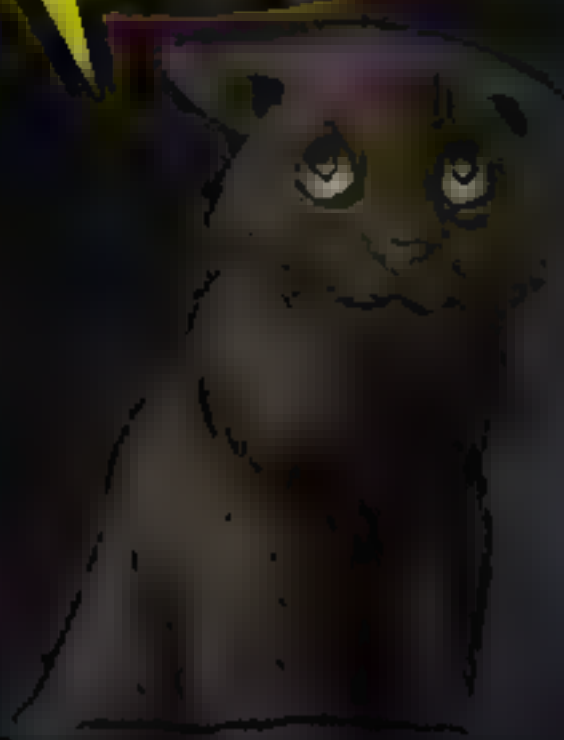
THIS IS
BULL



I'M NOT A DEPENDENT
AND I REFUSE TO BECOME ONE. I'LL GET
OUT OF HERE IF IT KILLS ME.

THEY
WOULDN'T
LET THAT
HAPPEN. THEY
MAY BE KID-
NAPPERS, BUT
THEY WANT
YOU VERY
MUCH ALIVE,
LIKE MYSELF
AND MY
PEERS.

YOU SHOULD SLEEP
YOU WILL COME TO APPRECIATE
EVERY AFTER MATHS FOR
A VILE...



YEAR,
WELL, I WON'T
BE RESTING
WELL IN THIS
FREAKING CAGE
YOU KNOW,
ARTUR...



ARTUR?



He was gone, leaving me with... no one but myself. And an odd sensation I hadn't noticed before. It felt kind of good... but also bad. Like a pressure inside my bones. Like static electricity along my muscles. It was faint. I wouldn't have noticed it had there been nothing else to pay attention to. But, my curiosity about the sensation was enough to distract me and allow me to relax. So, Sleep didn't come easy... but when it did, I have to admit... it felt nice at first.





- 1) How long does it take for the Crahil VIA to incubate within a human host?
 - 2) Why do werewolves change at the full moon?
 - 3) What is it called when a werewolf feels the urge to bite?
 - 4) What is an asterisk?
 - 5) How long does the average werewolf live?
 - 6) Why are you different from most werewolves?
 - 7) What is the average werewolf's stomach capacity?
 - 8) What is the tapetum lucidum?
- Why were you bitten?

Man... why are these questions so hard?

And it's so difficult to hold this pencil in my paws. Why am I the only one with paws? Was I not supposed to wear paws today? I hope no one laughs at me if...



FAITH, CALM DOWN.



SHH, I CAN'T TALK DURING THE TEST

NO, FAITH, THINK. WHERE ARE YOU?

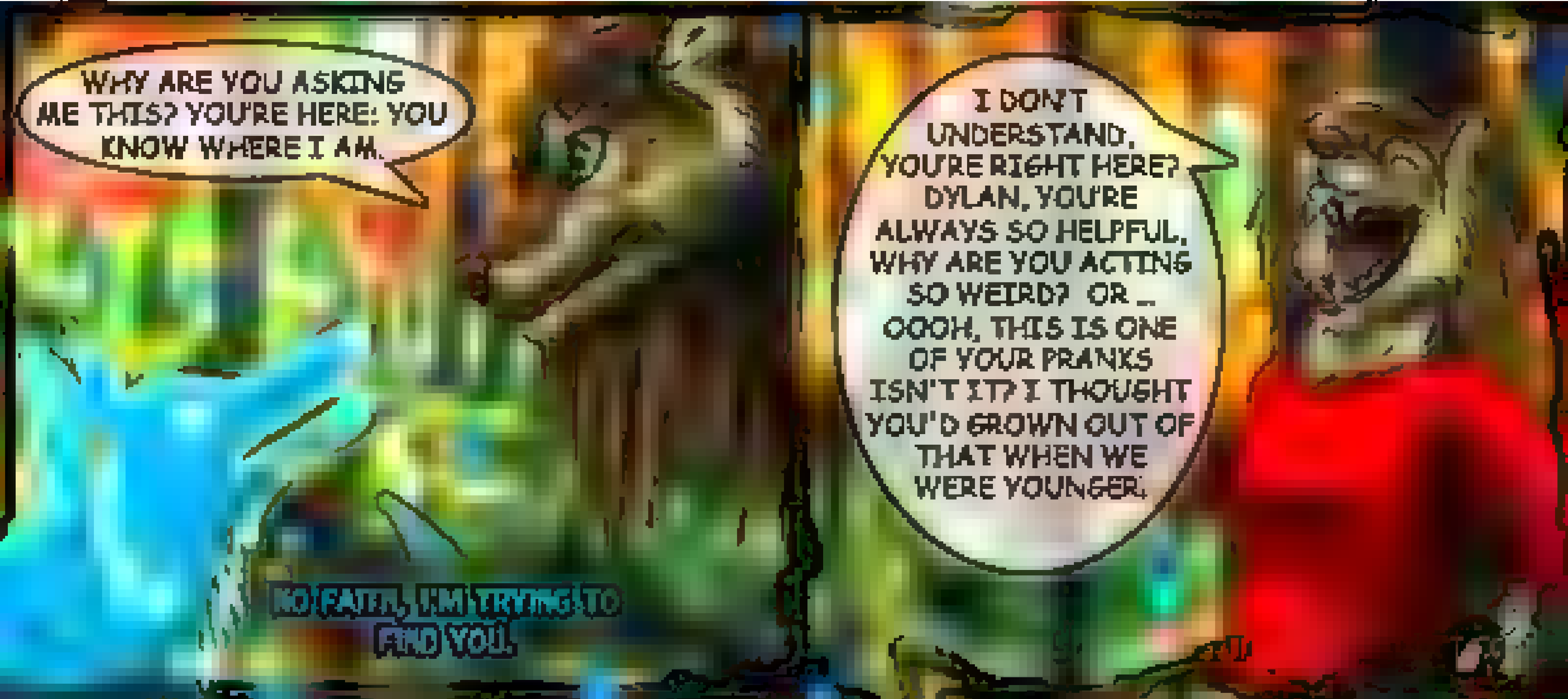


WELL, I THOUGHT I WAS IN COLLEGE, BUT IF YOU'RE HERE, THAT MEANS IT MUST BE HIGH SCHOOL...

NO FAITH! WHERE ARE YOU REALLY?



THE FOREST?



WHY ARE YOU ASKING
ME THIS? YOU'RE HERE: YOU
KNOW WHERE I AM.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND,
YOU'RE RIGHT HERE?
DYLAN, YOU'RE
ALWAYS SO HELPFUL,
WHY ARE YOU ACTING
SO WEIRD? OR ...
OOOH, THIS IS ONE
OF YOUR PRANKS
ISN'T IT? I THOUGHT
YOU'D GROWN OUT OF
THAT WHEN WE
WERE YOUNGER.

NO FATHER, I'M TRYING TO
FIND YOU.

YOU'RE DREAMING, FATHER! I NEED
YOU TO TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE
SO WE CAN COME GET YOU!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH
YOU? I'M NOT—

DREAMING!

WHAT THE ...
THAT WAS THE WEIRDEST
DREAM EVER.

YOU ARE
UP EARLY

WERE YOU ...
WERE YOU WATCHING ME
SLEEP?

DUDE, YOU
JUST GET CREEPIER AND
CREEPIER.



I AM TOLD THAT
YOU HAVE NOT ASKED
FOR ME YET

YOU SAID
YOU'D BE
BACK SOON.
SO I WAITED...
THOUGH I
CAN'T SAY I
WAS HEART-
BROKEN WHEN
YOU DIDN'T
SHOW UP.

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE...
AH, GENTLER, TO WAIT UNTIL
YOU WERE READY TO SEE ME
YESTERDAY. I WAS CHECKING
UP ON YOU, WHEN YOU
AWOKE. HAVE YOU RECON-
SIDERED YOUR POSITION?
WE... HAVE A, AH, POTENTIAL
PROBLEM THAT WILL OCCUR
SOMETIME WITHIN THE
NEXT YEAR, MAYBE TWO
YEARS, AND I WOULD LIKE
YOU TO BEGIN TRAINING
AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

LOOK,
BUDDY... IT SOUNDS
NICE WHEN YOU SPIN
IT THAT WAY, BUT I KNOW
BULLSHIT WHEN I SMELL
IT. YOU WERE WAITING
UNTIL I GOT SO STIR-
CRAZY IN THIS CELL THAT
I'D BE WILLING TO JOIN
YOUR LITTLE BRAIN-
WASTED CLUB JUST
TO GET OUT

YOU ARE A DIS-
TRUSTFUL CREATURE,
MISS ESPOSITO.

HEALEY-ESPOSITO.

IT IS EARLY FOR DRINKING...
BUT I JUST SO HAPPENED TO
HAVE THIS ON ME.

BLOW

MAY
WHAT
HAP-
PENED
TO ME
HAPPEN
TO YOU

I'M DIETING
ANYWAY

... YOUR
MORNING
RATIONS
WILL BE
CUT DUE
TO YOUR...
TRANS-
GRES-

True enough, no one brought me breakfast. Though, someone did bring me a glass of water. The scent on the glass was... very familiar. It took me a while, but ~~eventually~~ that is smelled very much like the cat

SNIEF?



Mr. Oppressive didn't return that day... and neither did the cat. Later, Hounds of God I didn't know brought me food, but no one spoke to me. One or two looked at me through the bars, some looking scared or sad.



I began to notice that there was a rhythm to the place... meals arrived at the same times, there were periods of business in the corridor outside of my cell, and, especially right at dinner the hall was silent

In the meantime though, I had little to occupy myself but my thoughts, and the sensation I'd noticed earlier, which felt a little stronger now. It was clear that the benandanti werewolves weren't gonna help me. Mr. Oppressive, who I was guessing was leading the place, well he was a nutjob. It was up to me.



As time went on, I began to get an idea... but if I was going to pull it off... I needed to be well rested...

YAWN





FAITH! THANK GOODNESS I WAS
ABLE TO FIND YOU AGAIN. YOU HAVE
TO TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE. WHAT
HAPPENED?

I... I THINK THE WOLF
GOT ME. I'M TRAPPED.

WHAT WOLF? WHAT WAS
YOU TRAPPED?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN...
AREN'T YOU TRAPPED
TOO?

NO, FAITH... THIS ISN'T REAL. YOU'RE DREAM-
ING, BUT I NEED TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE!

NO... IT IS REAL

FAITH, YOU HAVE
TO UNDERSTA—

NO... I REALLY AM
TRAPPED BY A WOLF BY LOTS OF WOLVES.
I'M... I'M IN ITALY. BUT UNDERGROUND...
IN THE PLACE...

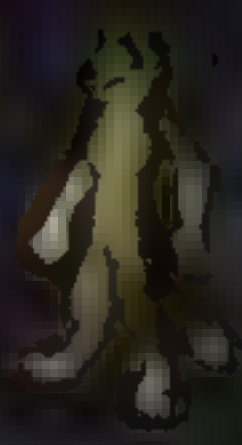
THE PLACE FOUNDED BY
TWO BROTHERS...

NO FAITH... DON'T WAKE UP. YOU
HAVE TO TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON!

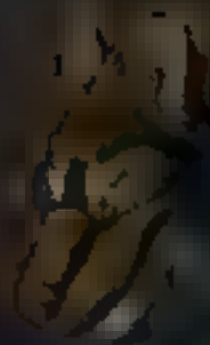
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, TWO
BROTHERS?



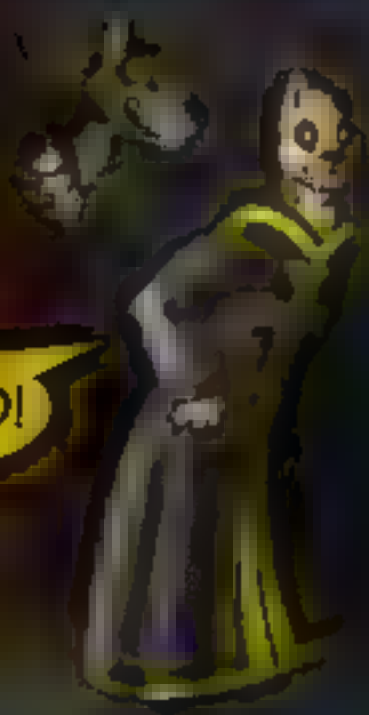
THAT...
FELT SO REAL.
MAN, I NEED TO GET
OUT OF HERE, I
THINK I MIGHT BE
LOSING IT. NOW I
JUST HAVE TO WAIT
UNTIL JUST AFTER
DINNER...



IS HERE
TO TAKE YOUR
PLATE AND
BUCKET.



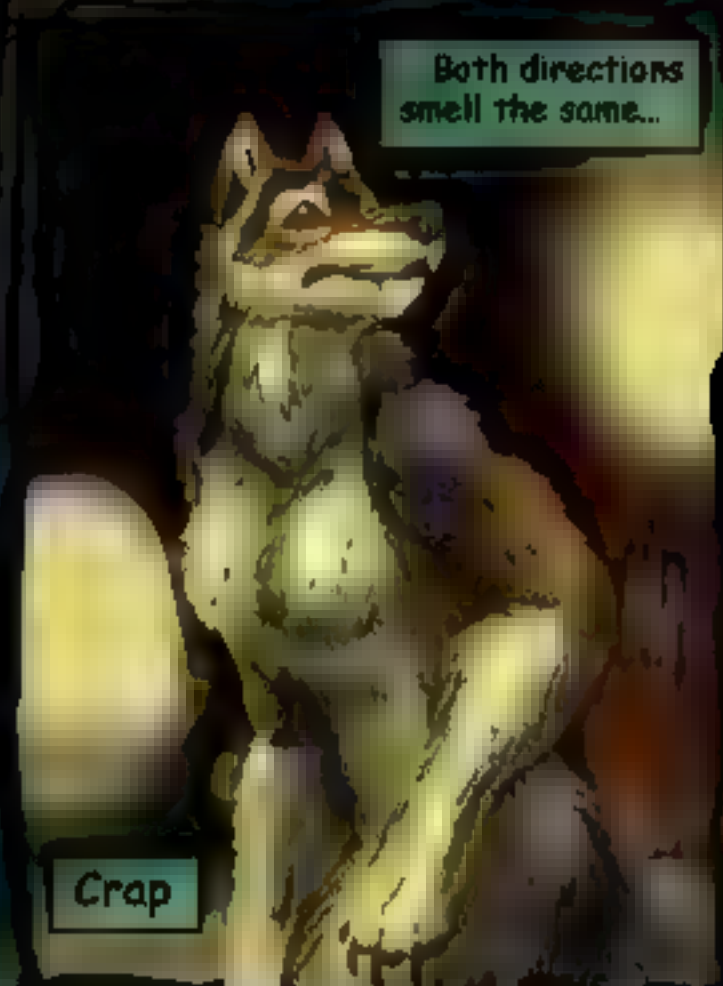
GET TO BACK CORNER.
ASPETTA ... DOVE ...?



ANDATO!



CRACK!

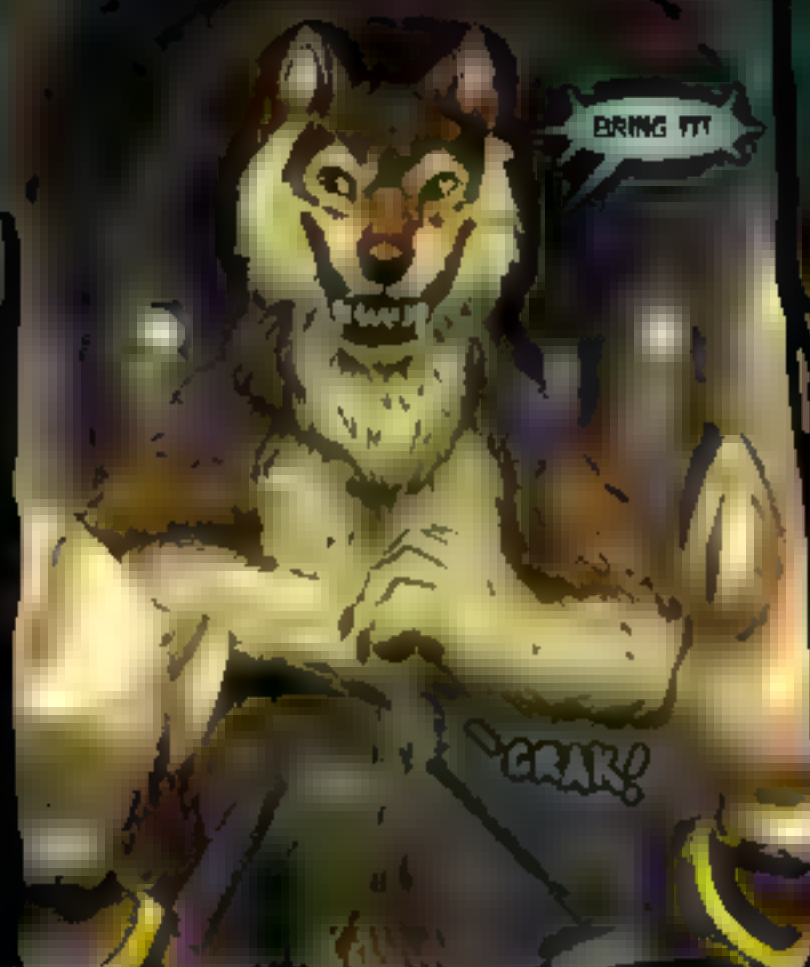


Both directions
smell the same...

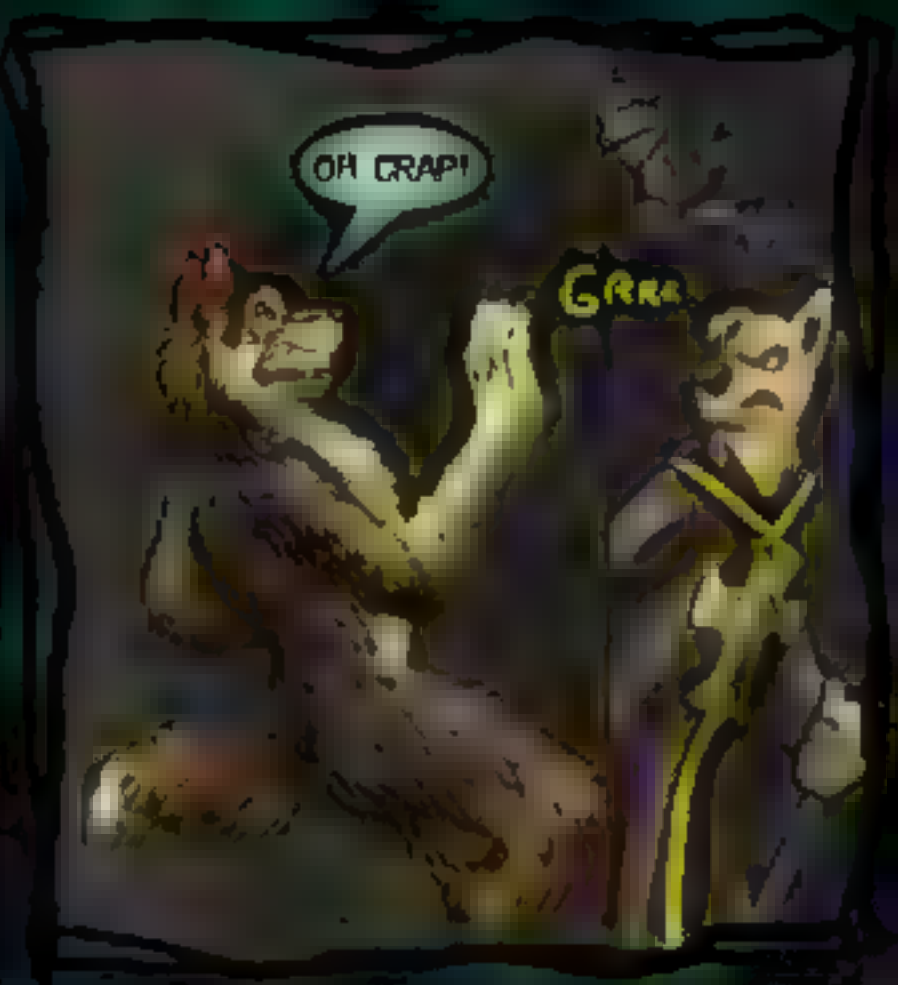


SWEET
DREAMS,
SUCKER

Crap







The next day I found that my wounds were much better than they had been when I received them. At first I thought I might have imagined how bad they had been...

...Had it not been that they continued to get better extremely quickly. It both hurt and kind of itched as they healed, distracting me from the earlier sensation I'd felt from previous days until they were all closed... only then did I notice the feeling... like adrenalin, but tempered, humming just below the surface of my skin. However, while my wounds got better, I could have been doing better... I was famished, since the whole day, I didn't get any food.



MY APOLOGIES ABOUT FORGETTING TO FEED YOU... I, AH, WAS DISTRACTED BY MY INJURED COMRADES.

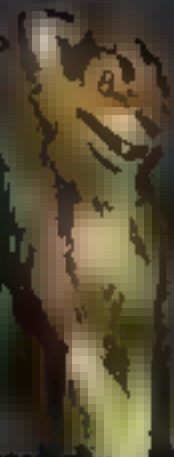
OUT THE CRAP, CREEPO. YOU DIDN'T FORGET, AND CERTAINLY SOMEONE ELSE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. IT WAS INTENTIONAL. I STILL HAVE NO DESIRE TO JOIN YOUR FREAKY HOUNDS-OF-GOD CULT.



LISTEN, MISS ESPOSITO... YOU'RE UPSET, I UNDERSTAND... AND I HOPE YOU WILL SOMEDAY FORGIVE ME FOR IT, SAME AS I HAVE COME TO FORGIVE YOU FOR YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS. PLEASE BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY THAT THIS IS NOT ONLY IN YOUR OWN BETS INTEREST, BUT EVERYONE ELSE'S TOO. YOU ARE A LONE WEREWOLF, WITH ONLY A BZOU FOR LUPINE COMPANY YOU HAVE NO PACK... AND HERE, NOT ONLY WILL YOU HAVE A PACK, BUT CAN ACHIEVE YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL. LIKE SAINT RONAN, YOU CAN ACHIEVE GREATNESS WHILE STILL BEING A WEREWOLF



AND WHAT IF I WASN'T A WERE-WOLF? WHAT IF I WAS ONE OF THOSE... THOSE, OH... AG... AGRARIAN BENANDANT? THE ONES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE TOTEM POLE? SOUNDS LIKE THEY HAVE TROUBLE ACHIEVING GREATNESS AROUND HERE...



THERE ARE PLENTY OF NON-WEREWOLVES WHO HAVE DONE GREAT THINGS IN THE NAME OF GOD. WHY, THE FAMED CODEX GIGAS WAS CREATED BY A DRAGON WHO WANTED A BIBLE LARGE ENOUGH FOR HIS TALONS AND---

AND THE AGRARIAN BENEDICT??

THEY ALL SERVE VERY IMPORTANT ROLES IN GOD'S PLAN.

WELL, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU TREAT THEM MORE LIKE PROPERTY THAN PEOPLE.

THAT IS MERELY HOW IT APPEARS FROM THE OUTSIDE. IF YOU WERE TO JOIN US, YOU WOULD COME TO SEE DIFFERENTLY

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT I JOIN WILLINGLY?

I WOULD NEVER FORCE YOU TO JOIN OUR ORDER.

YOU KNOW, MR. OPPRESSIVE, WHILE SOME OF THESE WEREWOLVES SEEM TO HAVE GENETIC FLAWS LIKE HAIRLESSNESS OR WHATEVER, I THINK YOUR GENES MAKE YOU MESS UP IN THE HEAD. I MEAN REALLY? YOU'D NEVER FORCE ME? KIDNAPPING AND IMPRISONMENT FOLLOWED BY RESTRICTION OF NECESSITIES ASIDE, YOU MEAN?



MR. OPPRESSIVE. HUM. THESE ARE, AH, MERELY THE TOOLS NEEDED IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE GOOD OF ALL. IF ONLY YOU'D COME TO REASON AND SEE THAT... I WAS HOPING YOU'D SEE THE LIGHT BEFORE WE "GO OUT" TOMORROW... USUALLY WE ONLY GO OUT AT SPECIAL TIMES, SUCH AS THE PENTECOST, THE EMBER DAYS, ST LUCY'S, AND TOMORROW - CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHRISTMAS EVE...

YOUR FIRST CHRISTMAS AT HOME. NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, MISS ESPOSITO...

I felt as though the world was reeling. I had lost track of time in this place. It was odd... I knew this was going to be my first Christmas away from my parents... but this still wasn't how I pictured it would be. My parents had been divorced for so long, I was used to being away from half of my family every year, but this year I also had my friends... and even though I hadn't known them long, they were closer than any friends I'd ever had. Heck, until I'd been bitten... I never felt such a need to have friends. The folks back in Maplevue... they had become more like family. I'd been looking forward to Christmas with them... and I missed them so much it ached.



I missed Maggie's annoying optimism, and Dylan's support... Todd's... well, his enthusiasm. I somehow missed Seamus's lectures, and even Gaoth, though I didn't know him very well, he...



Wait. The day he met me... when he first met me he said.

HOUND OF GOD...

He knew. I'd thought it was some weird expression... like 'oh my god' or something... but he knew.



He knew... and he didn't tell me. He didn't warn me.

DAMNIT
GAOTH,
YOU
SONOVA
BITCH,



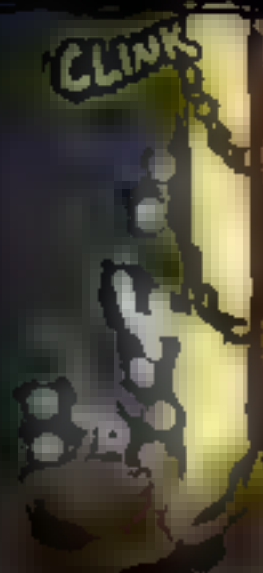
When Christmas Eve arrived, things grew busy in the corridor. But unlike the merriment and festive atmosphere that usually accompanied such a time, the air reeked with anxiety and stress. The Benandanti of varying ranks marched through the corridors with grim expressions treating this 'going out' business as though they were going to war. Heck, maybe they were.



The scent of their stress, along with my longing for home and anger at them for my imprisonment festered inside me. But mostly... I felt betrayed. If I ever got out of here, I was going to bite Gaath's pointy little ears off, slowly. It was easy to focus on such things... it kept me from wallowing in self-pity.



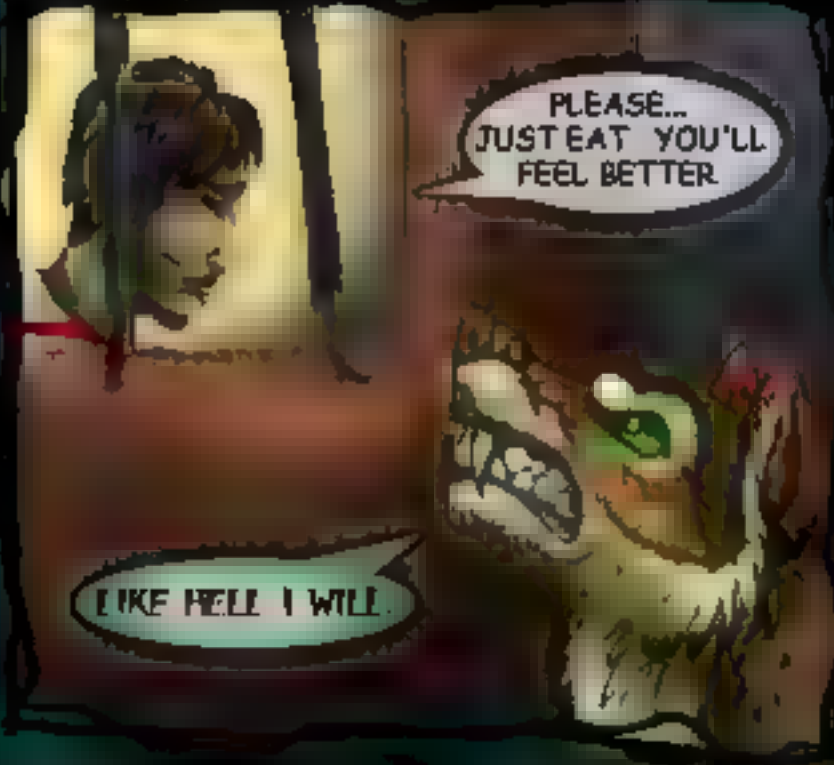
I hid behind my feral impulses, which seemed to be fed by the strange sensation building in me. I found myself growling and snapping whenever anyone drew near my cell... My inability to do anything to help myself was maddening.



Though... at dinner a familiar scent wafted through the bars as my food was slid through the slot.



SO THAT'S WHAT A SCHEMING, SPINELESS CAT LOOKS LIKE MOST OF THE TIME. NICE TO SEE YOU, ARTHUR.



Faith... I am truly sorry for what has happened. I... My people and I... Are wrong to have done this to you. This is not God's way. I am one of the few Agrarian Benandanti guards who remain here and conscious while everyone else goes out. While they are serving our world by doing battle with the demonic Melandanti, I will help you get out. wait for me.

The wait was long... painfully long. Even the melodious prayers of those about to leave to do battle with these supposed Melandanti did nothing to soothe me. But eventually... the prayers subsided. All I could hear was the occasional sigh of air through the tunnel, and the flickering of the torches. But then...



LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE,
WHERE THERE IS HATRED,
LET ME SOW LOVE,
WHERE THERE IS INJURY,
PARDON,
WHERE THERE IS DOUBT,
FAITH.



IT TOOK YOU LO—

SHH!

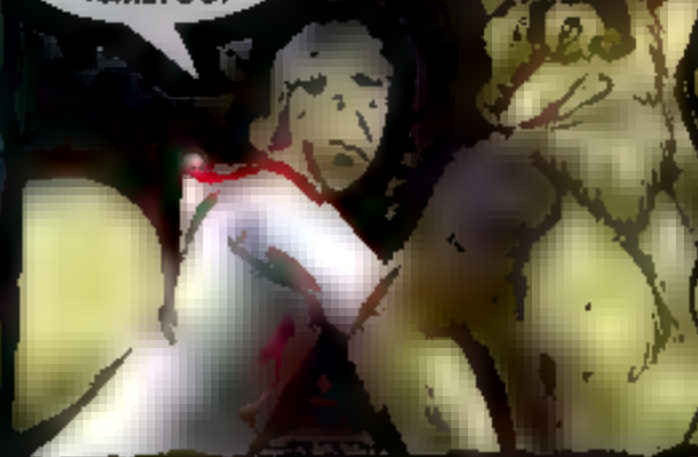
I HEARD VAT YOU SAID
TO OUR LEADER, OUR CAPTAIN.
I... I THINK YOU WERE RIGHT IT
IS TIME WE HAD A DIFFERENT
WAY, I THINK. BUT YOU
MUST GO.

ONE OF
THE TUNNELS
I WAS TO GUARD
LEADS OUT INTO
ONE OF THE
NEARBY PARKS. I
HAVE WALKED THE
WAY FROM HERE,
SO ALL YOU NEED
TO DO IS FOLLOW
MY SCENT ONCE
OUTSIDE, HEAD
WEST VILE IT IS
NOT UNINHAB-
ITED, IF YOU KEEP
TO THE FORESTED
AREAS OF THE
PARKS YOU CAN
WORK YOUR WAY
TO THE OCEAN.
ONCE THERE, ASK
FOR— SOMEONE
IS COMING. YOU
MUST GO, GO
NOW!



BUT...

THERE IS NO
TIME! GO!





Soon, the bricks and cobblestones gave way to hard, slick floor water seeping from the walls here and there. Then, I caught a whiff of something... in fact, a whiff of many things all at once.



The corridor twisted and turned, but Arthur's scent guided me the right way when the corridor split or intersected other passages.



Fresh air! After being cooped up with nothing but the same stink for so long, the scent of grass and trees and even that of car exhaust and such was so sweet and familiar, it made me want to cry.

The tunnel got narrower and narrower until I could just barely fit, and then...

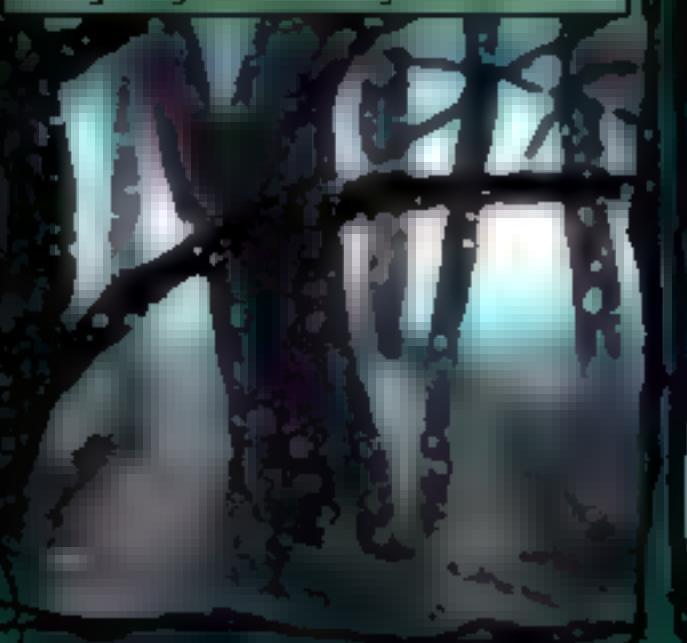




The smells! The sounds! They were all so crystal clear, clear as the moonlight night I ran through!



Though I knew better than to howl... the night song in my blood as I ran, and encouraged me to sing as well. Everything seemed so wonderful and new; it was like seeing things in a fresh light.



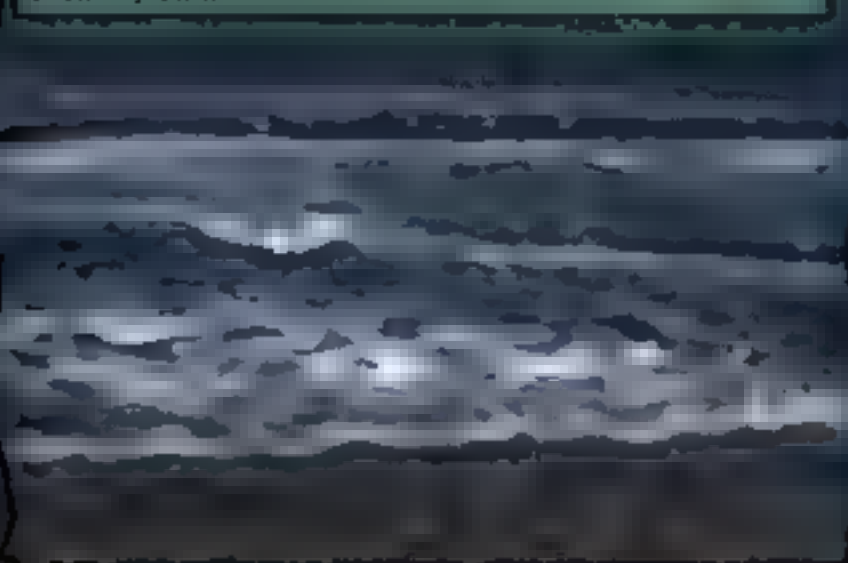
The humming in my veins felt like music, and as I looked up I finally understood that odd sensation that had been building. I could FEEL the moon's effect, if I was left with few distractions.



I don't know how long I ran... I just... did. My nose guided me away from the scents of habitation; my ears perked and ready listening for pursuers... but none came. The miles passed by in a snowy blur under my paws... hours went by the moon keeping watch over me as I went... until, suddenly, salty, fishy air reached my nose...



I'd never seen such a large body of water before. I'd always planned see the ocean but got sidetracked. But this... this wasn't even the ocean this was the... oh man, why didn't I pay better attention in geography? It was some sort of sea... I wasn't even on the opposite side of the ocean that separated this continent from my own.



I was trapped in a strange place, and I didn't even have clothes with which to dress in or know any of the language... unless "Pasta" and "Ravioli" could somehow get me a plane flight home.





PERCHÉ COSÌ TRISTE,
POCO LUPO?



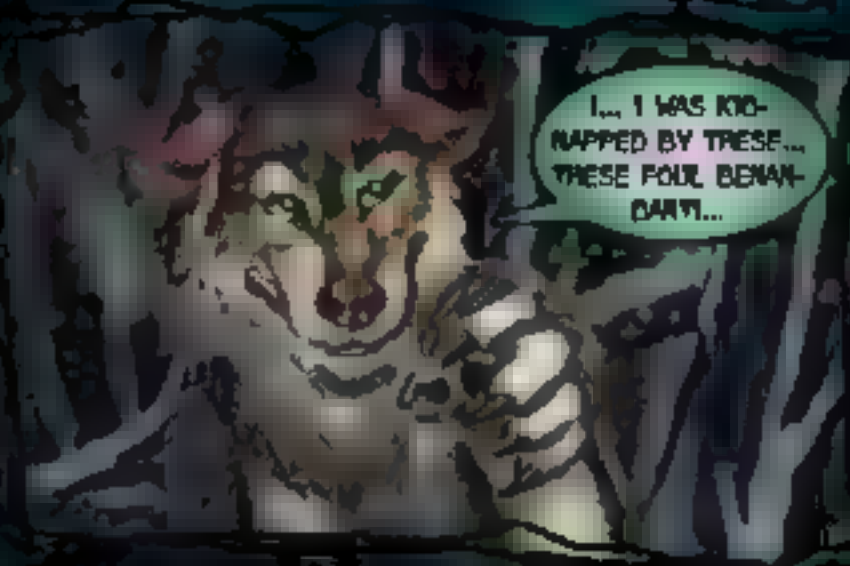
DON'T HURT ME!
LEAVE ME ALONE!

OH! YOU SPEAK
ENGLISH! I THOUGHT
I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE
YOU... TELL ME, WHAT
HAS YOU SO SAD..



IT'S
CHRISTMAS
EVE, AFTER
ALL!

YOU SHOULD
BE MERRY!



I... I WAS KID-
NAPPED BY THESE...
THESE FOUR BENAN-
DARTI...



AHH...
NAUGHTY
WOLVES...
THOUGH THEIR
HEARTS ARE IN
THE RIGHT
PLACE. THEY
DO AN AWFUL
LOT OF GOOD,
TOO, YOU
KNOW



ONE OF
THE OTHER
KINDS HELPED ME
ESCAPE... BUT I'M
STILL LOST, AND I
HAVE NOTHING TO
HELP ME OUT...
THAT IS, UNLESS
YOU... YOU'RE THE
ONE I'M SUPPOSED
TO ASK FOR?



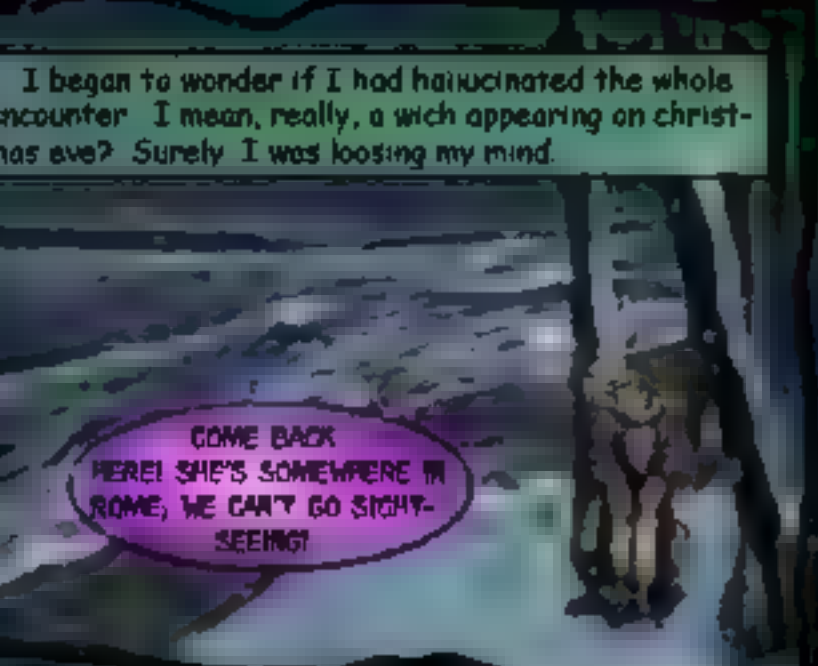
HOW ABOUT YOU
TELL OLD BEFANA WHAT
YOU'D LIKE FOR CHRIST-
MAS, DEARIE?



I... I WISH I COULD
HAVE MY FRIENDS COME HERE
AND TAKE ME BACK HOME. BUT IT'S
NOT LIKE YOU CAN DO THAT FOR ME,
SO, IF YOU COULD LOAN ME SOME
CLOTHES, THAT...



Gone?!



I began to wonder if I had hallucinated the whole
encounter. I mean, really, a witch appearing on christ-
mas eve? Surely I was loosing my mind.

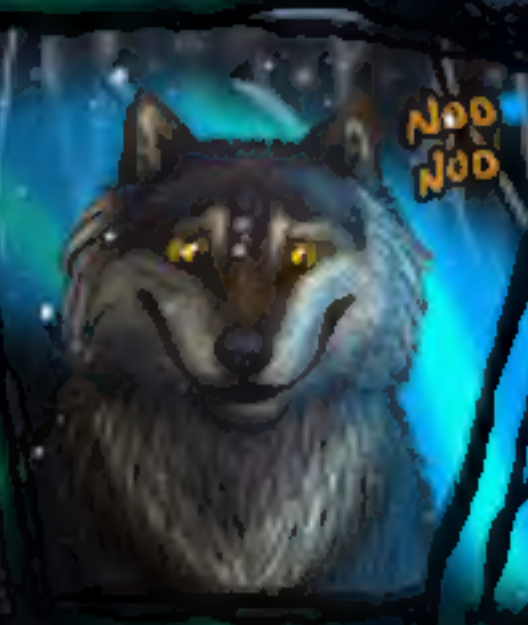
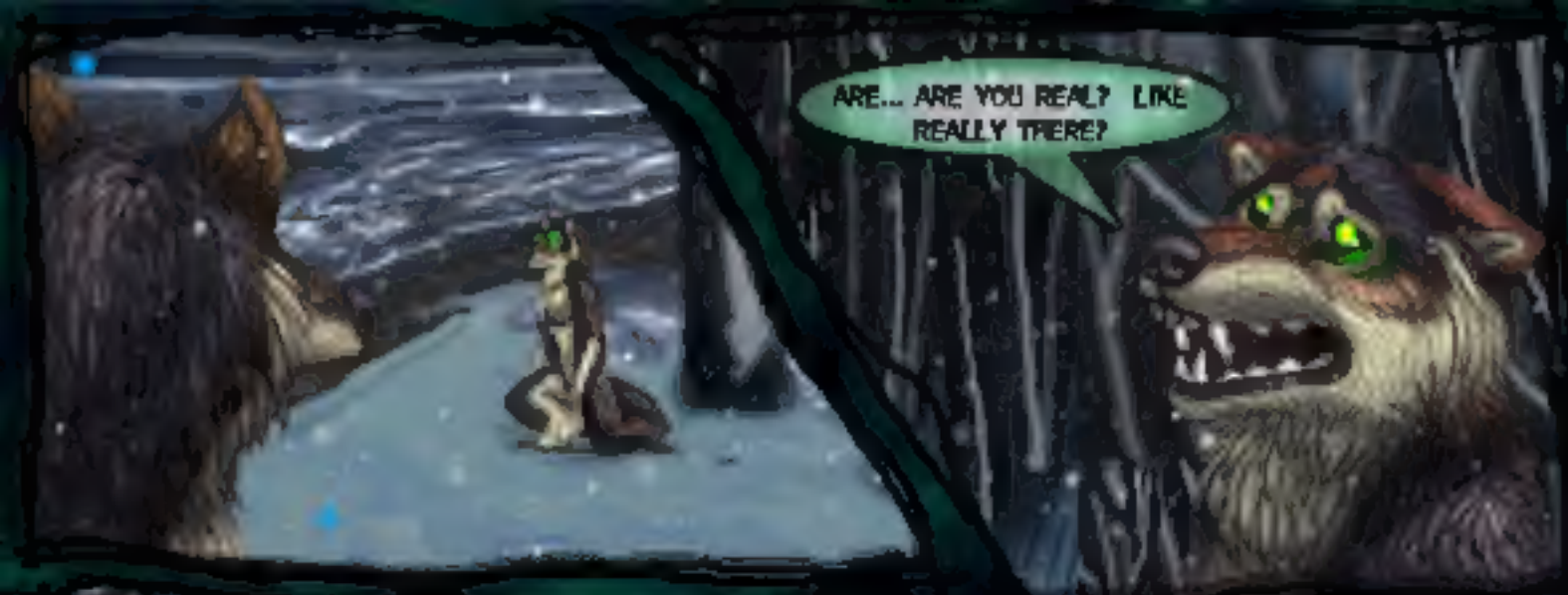


COME BACK
HERE! SHE'S SOMEWHERE IN
ROME, WE CAN'T GO SIGHT-
SEEING!



RRRR...
NO, I SMELL
SOMETHING!

WELL, MATE,
ALL I SMELL IS YOU AND
WINTER SO.. WAIT WAIT,
I SMELL IT TOO!



HOW... HOW DID YOU FIND ME?

YOU TOLD ME, REMEMBER? IN YOUR DREAMS?

YOU... THAT WAS REAL?

FAITH, YOU'RE KIND OF DENSE SOMETIMES, BUT THAT'S WHY WE LOVE YOU.

ONE OF THE PERKS OF BEING A SPIRIT GUIDE! IT WAS HARD TO FIND YOU THOUGH... IT WAS COOL, LIKE SOMETHING WAS HELPING ME FIND YOU. I TOLD GAOTH ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID IN YOUR DREAMS, AND HE WORKED OUT WHERE YOU WERE.

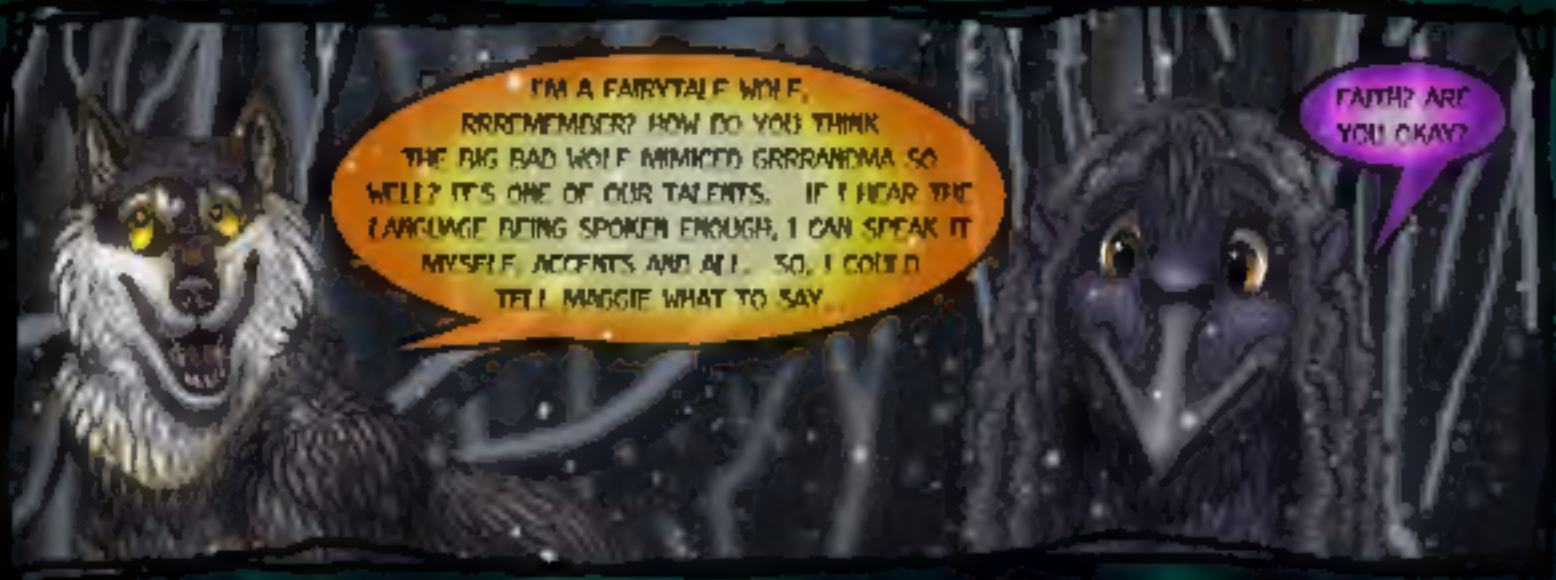
GAOTH! TRAIT SNAKE, HE KNEW ABOUT THE BASTARDS WHO RAB ME, AND WHEN I SEE HIM AGAIN, I'LL RIP HIS—

WOAH, WOAH... REMEMBER, HE WORKED OUT WHERE YOU WERE; HE EVEN FINANCED MOST OF OUR TRIP HERE TO RESCUE YOU.

YEAH. HE PULLED SOME STRINGS TO GET US OUT HERE ASAP, AND WHEN WE GOT HERE, I DID SOME ASKING AROUND—

YOU? YOU DON'T SPEAK ITALIAN—

MA LO FACCIOT



I'M A FAIRYTALE WOLF.
RRREMEMBER? HOW DO YOU THINK
THE BIG BAD WOLF MIMICED GRRRANDMA SO
WELL? IT'S ONE OF OUR TALENTS. IF I HEAR THE
LANGUAGE BEING SPOKEN ENOUGH, I CAN SPEAK IT
MYSELF, ACCENTS AND ALL. SO, I COULD
TELL MAGGIE WHAT TO SAY.

FAITH? ARE
YOU OKAY?

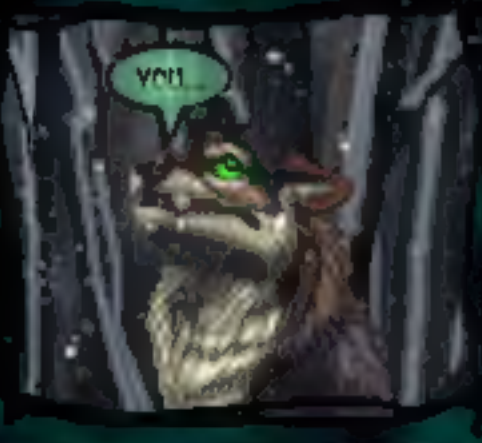


FAITH...
WE'LL GET YOU OUT OF
HERE.

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.



IT'S ALL OVER



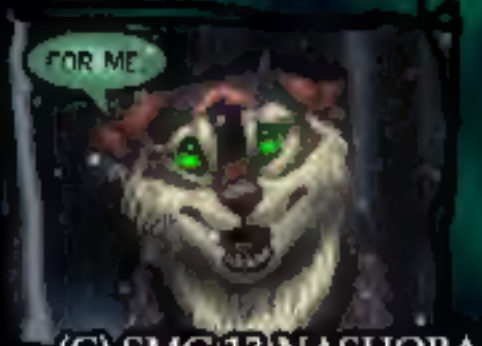
YOU.



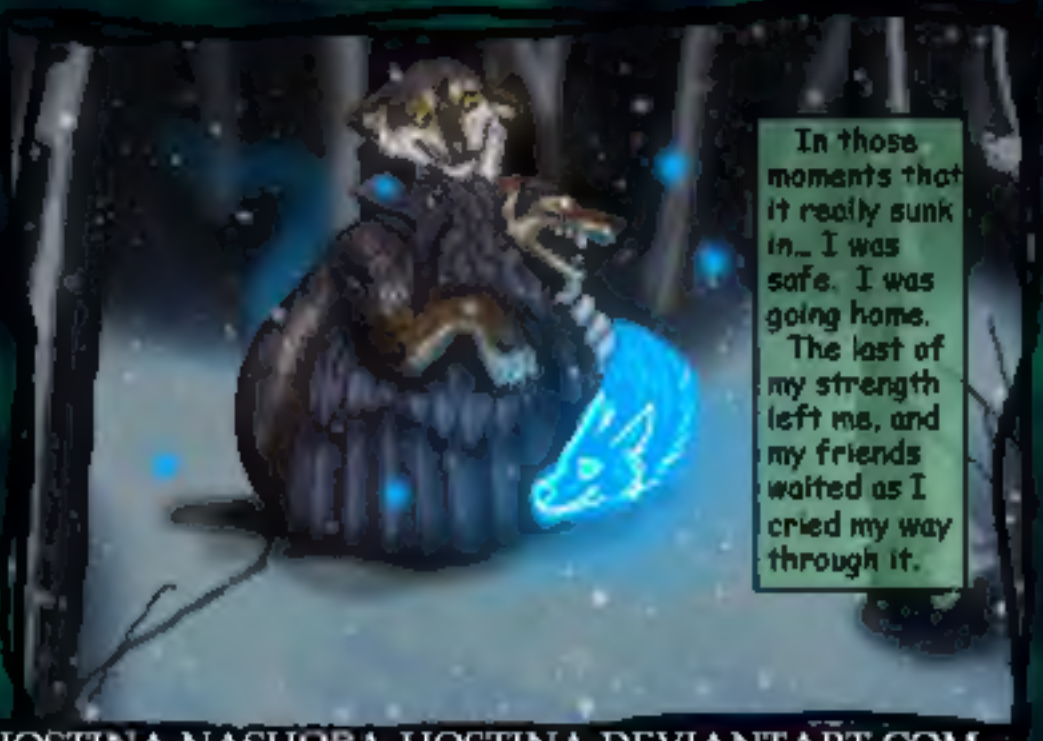
I... I DIDN'T
KNOW IF I'D EVER SEE YOU
AGAIN, AND I...



YOU CAME



FOR ME.



In those
moments that
it really sunk
in... I was
safe. I was
going home.
The last of
my strength
left me, and
my friends
waited as I
cried my way
through it.

